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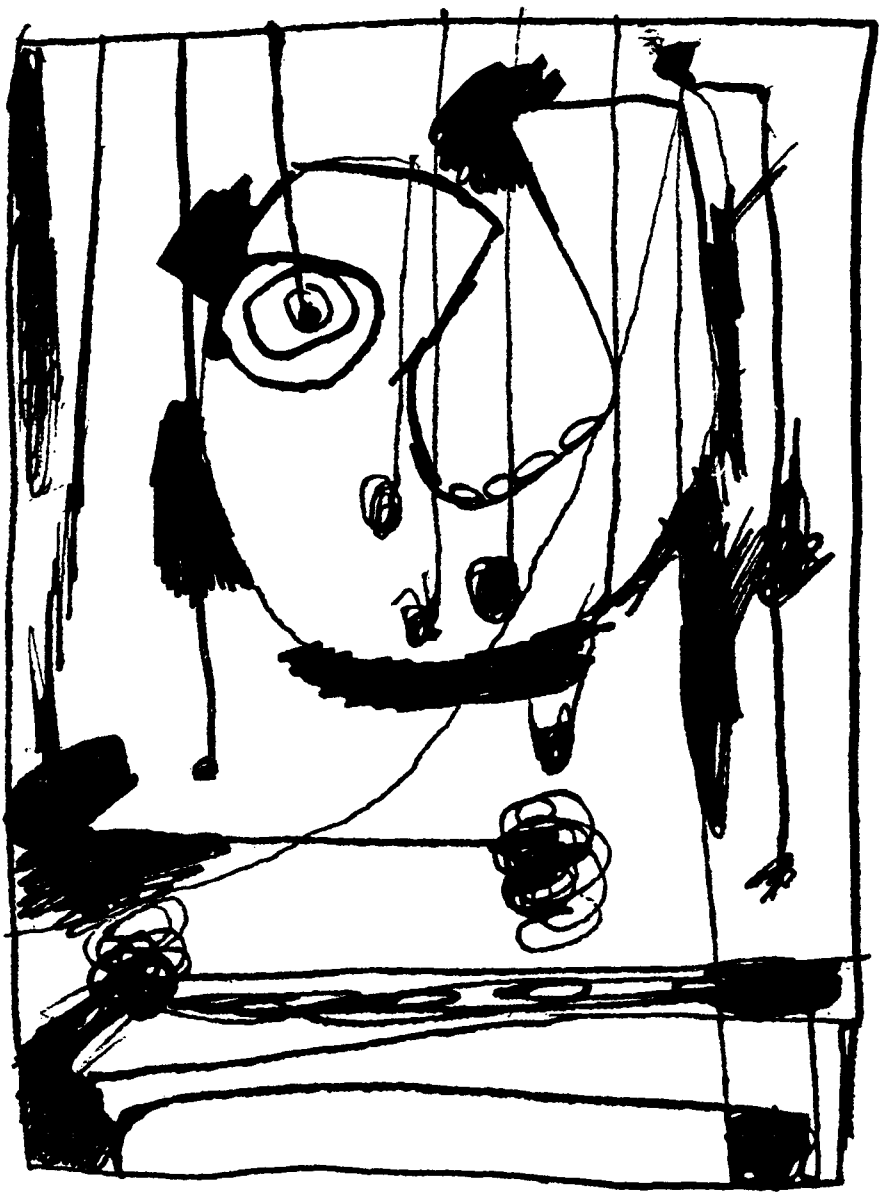

DRAWING, by William Baziotes

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Leslie A. Fiedler

AN EXPENSE OF SPIRIT

I should perhaps begin by telling you that I am accustomed to live, as it were, with my left hand. It is not impossible that you have seen, through the flawed glass window of the shop where I work, my back bent toward some customer in the meaningless similitude of worship. You will have seen our mouths moving and our gestures: mine pleading, the customer's assured and pre-emptory, for at that moment she is queen, though queen only of me; and you will have guessed our words, inaudible to you in the bright shabby street. I am a shoe salesman, a shoedog my colleagues prefer to say, too frail and timorous to work ever in the great downtown stores, where each pants-leg is creased to an ultimate sharpness, each skull, ferociously brushed and brilliantined, shines in the subdued light, and the quick crackle of conviction spreads from the insolent smile, the jaunty stride, noiseless on the thick carpeting.

Even in our shop, one of the smallest on a second-rate business street, even behind our show-window proffering its few outmoded styles in a hopeless jumble, I do not completely fit. "Please, Brandler!" the Boss cries to me from time to time, "*please*—at least the glasses change! Those—those—" He can never find a word for the large black-rimmed spectacles behind which my face attains a pinched and solemn dignity that offends him. "Try, at least, a snappy pair pince-nez!" But he can do nothing, for the Union protects me, and he is really, in a bitter and uncomprehending way, proud of the difference I assert.

I am a writer. As yet I have published nothing, and I am not brash enough to predict that I ever shall, though I have had some encouraging correspondence with one publisher and another, enough to assure me that I am not wholly without merit. There is, you will

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understand, an advantage in my position; committed neither to success nor failure, I am, in my writing, singularly *free*.

My job is a most fortunate one; weekdays I work from four in the afternoon until ten at night (it is, usually, of course eleven, for the Boss is reluctant always to shut the door, admit that there will be no more customers), and on Saturdays until midnight. Our trade is drawn chiefly from among working people, to whom we offer beyond the simple opportunity to buy, the brightness of our neon-lighted front, that makes with the other five or six blocks of stores in our district a sort of nightly bazaar, through which before sleep, alone or in pairs, they parade, calling to each other words indistinguishable to us inside.

My two colleagues, who in general suspect my sanity, find confirmation of their doubts in my having chosen permanently the evening shift, which formerly was taken in turns every third week. But I am glad to have mornings and early afternoons always my own, for it is then that, properly, I live. In the store or in my rented room, where I return only to sleep or to find every third or fourth week with some casual girl what is called satisfaction, I live parenthetically, scarcely committing myself to consciousness. I spend next to nothing of that spirit I need to write; it is not false modesty that makes me tell you I have none to spare. My former friends, writers, too, who have chosen to become teachers, journalists, or book-reviewers, are, I know, wrong—dissipating in daily life their irredeemable creative stuff; mine is the ideal arrangement.

It is only in the Public Library that I am able to write, or reading, feed the sources of my small power; it is there that I am not Hyman Brandler but Harry Brendon, my chosen name—not my father's son, but my own creation. I must, I suppose, know our Library, knowing it in love, better than anyone else: the dim mathematical stacks through which the guards eternally prowl to find the boy masturbating; the Communist mutilating the book that assails the Soviet Union; the ancient librarians in Fiction perpetually dozing from hostility over their rubber stamps; and more ancient even than they, the guardian of the Men's Room, trembling shamelessly on his secret stool in the broom closet, falling toward something more obscene than sleep. There is a modest sense of eternity here that even the nervous chatter of the very youngest librarians cannot impugn,

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a timelessness proper to my task which can never be finished, at least not without becoming something quite different.

Each morning I am among the first to arrive, waiting quietly on the stone steps between the stone Greek jars for the iron grille to be folded back, the glass doors to be opened. I rush up the marble inner steps to the Reading Room where the tables wait, long and polished, as if for a feast. The younger librarians nod to me, for I am a familiar figure, distinguished among the rabble of bums escaping the cold, their ruined faces bowed to unread newspapers, high school students glumly searching periodical indexes, and frantic old men compiling statistics for pamphlets on vegetarianism or currency reform.

Sometimes a friend (our friendship has shrunk to precisely this encounter) will seek me out at my customary place, and in a corner we will whisper of the progress of my current book in the hushed voices a Library compels. But I speak to none of the habitués, nor do they offer to address me. Once, a young man who had sat beside me for nearly two months took to smiling at me and making various motions of the head inviting confidence, and I was forced to move. I did it with reluctance, for I had grown accustomed to my particular spot, and there is in the habitual a kind of peace; besides, the young man in question had amused me with an odd nervous habit of pulling the skin of his neck, in an unbelievable fashion, up over his chin to the verge of his lower lip.

In those moments, experienced by everyone who tries to write, when words simply would not come, I found some solace in watching him guardedly, examining the texture of his neck, which seemed not a bit different from that of anyone else, until rapt (he read only poetry) he would pull the grotesque lap of flesh incredibly upward. That unforeseeable extension of the skin, useless, a little disgusting, but—somehow—a feat, seemed to me a just metaphor of my own work.

I find it hard to say why I, so unremittingly on guard against the casual encounter, the idle expense of conversation, went to the first of the Library's Sunday lectures on Great Books. That it was a mistake I must have known even then, but there was in their being given in the Library a specious warrant of familiarity, and in their being given on that day the appeal of the uncustomary. I had often walked past the dark unused buildings on Sundays, dismayed at

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the impenetrability, the rigor of the walls, as at a friend who passes in the street without a greeting. Once I had seen light moving inside and had pressed my face curiously against the glass doors, but I could make out no one in the faint glow, only the familiar curve of the main staircase. An unreasonable kind of jealousy moved me, and I had remained peering through the doors until someone shouted from behind me, in a coarse voice full of the supposed advantage of its knowledge, "Hey, Bud! It don't open on Sundays!" But I had not even troubled to answer, though, stupidly, he had repeated the words three times.

As a matter of fact, I have always found Sundays difficult. True, I sleep late, having stayed up for a few drinks after work the night before. I go alone and never to the same bar two weeks in a row, but even so, sometimes I have to flee before the sodden confession of a fellow drinker, the insolent camaraderie of a bartender; one is never secure from the assault of openness, the demand for assent or sympathy that flourishes everywhere in our world, in the barber chair or at the counter where one stops to buy a pair of socks.

I wake at noon, go down for a hasty lunch, and return to read the *New York Times* (we have no decent paper in our city) until late afternoon, when I walk alone to recapitulate the endless problems of my work. I explore always those parts of our city most remote from where I spent my boyhood and where now the children of those I can remember only as children shriek and fall and run for comfort into familiar houses. Once a month, however, I go to the home of my parents to listen to their known reproaches: why am I not, at my age, married? Why do I, an intelligent boy who has gone to college, work at such a job? It is what I owe them, and I pay the debt precisely, three hours from my greeting until, nodding to my father, kissing my mother's forehead, I depart, a package of cookies wrapped in a newspaper in my hand. "He is busy with his writing," my mother assures my father when I have gone. "Otherwise he would come oftener. Someday he'll be a Somebody—you'll see!" And my father, who has said nothing to begin with, of course does not reply.

But most important of all in my decision to attend that unfortunate meeting was, I am sure, the fact that I had just finished my second novel and, awaiting the responses of publishers, which to be

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sure I could foresee, was unable to begin anything new. My routine does not provide for such intervals; ideally, I suppose, I should undertake some unbroken series of works as long as my expected life, but I am, alas, not equal to even so modest an ideal as I have proposed.

I remember standing before the Library that day with a dim sense of profanation, checking my watch, the leaflet in my hand to be sure of the date, the time (somewhere the public reassurance of a steeple clock boomed twice the hour), and then committing myself to the door, trembling, I must confess, just a little. An attendant I did not recognize, seeing my hesitation just inside the entrance, asked almost inaudibly, "Great Books?" and at my nod, indicated a small door off the central corridor into which I had seen only librarians pass before. Retreat was impossible after my nod of affirmation and under that hostile stare, so I pushed forward toward inevitable disappointment. No room could, I fear, have been adequate to my hope; but the strange face at the entry, the query scarcely heard, and the door I had never used justified surely more than the dim barren room I entered, inhabited by a score of chairs, a library table, like the dusty flora of a not quite desert.

There were already too many people present for the chairs, and the attendant thrusting ineptly into the room behind me with extra seats, nearly knocked me over on to my face. When I had recovered from the assault of his clumsiness (I have a certain native aplomb, unlooked for perhaps in one who ventures so seldom into public), I found myself seated, or more precisely, wedged in beside a large darkish man who overflowed relentlessly on to my seat. Though the room was not warm, he had taken off his coat, revealing great damp patches of sweat on his back and under his arms; he smelled of maleness as an animal does, an acrid but not wholly unpleasant odor.

It would be a shade melodramatic to say that he frightened me, but his very existence seemed a threat to my status; I was, at least, uneasy. Even before the proceedings started (someone indistinct through the tobacco smoke wrestled with a pile of papers on the table before us, as if they must be subdued before a beginning was possible), he jerked about in exaggerated spasms of impatience, endangering my precarious seathold.

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I could hear a woman's voice beside him, though I could see nothing of her around his hugeness but a hand advocating patience in an occasional gesture. I felt it, though I do not customarily make such responses, as a charming hand. From time to time that immense head would turn toward me, with a pitiful attempt at stealth, in baffled recognition, but his wife's hand touching him gently would recall him to attention.

I found myself awaiting the turning of his head with an odd mingling of dread and expectancy; he had a strange, an utterly unforeseeable face, that contradicted, in what I could not help feeling was a tragic way, his body. It was not simply that it was a sad face, and yet somehow clearly intended for joy, but that it was irredeemably unaware of its sadness, incapable of knowing it; its sorrow was physical only, a sorrow of the muscles, of bone. It never occurred to me that I knew him.

Even at that point, I think, nothing need have happened, had I not (it seemed harmless enough and I could not, in any case, have helped it) fallen asleep. I am not, looking back, ashamed of it; there was no discourtesy, for with the light against the heavy lenses of my glasses I ran little risk of being noticed, and I do not, of course, snore. It seemed the proper response to the scarcely audible, lisping presentation of the speaker. I could make out only the most familiar words: "idea," "matter," "justice," but the speaker's haughty finical face swelled in the haze of tobacco smoke, agitated by some unsuspected ventilation, his exaggerated motions of emphasis beginning from the hip, his tweed jacket, too elegant for our grimy streets grew larger— larger— then—

"Congratulations! I couldn't have done better myself!" The bulky man beside me was thumping me awake with a beefy palm, whooping meanwhile most vulgarly with what he apparently took for good humor.

"I must have been asleep." It was, I fear, an absurd remark, but I was scarcely awake and the crowd that had risen, unwilling quite yet to depart, threatened to turn its idle malice upon us. We were a curious pair, and someone already had begun to laugh.

"You can say that again, my friend," he bellowed, and, quite abruptly, "I know you!"

I remembered him then, of course, that giant body bare before

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me in the long lines at the Induction Center; I do not willingly recall those terrible hours when all my hard-won integrity pulsed naked and afraid under those prodding fingers. The doctors had kept us together, making use of our disparity (I am somewhat under middle height), as one of them put it, "for the laughs."

"Yes," I said with what I hoped was apparent coldness, turning to go. "Yes. How have you been?"

He reached out a great soggy paw, and held me by the arm, helpless. "Hey, wait now. That isn't polite. We're sort of buddies, after all." He must have seen me wince at the obnoxious epithet, the gross assumption of familiarity, for, not releasing his hold, he turned to his wife, turning me about with him, will-less and baffled like a sulky child. "This is my old buddy—" He stopped for the name, mocking me.

"Brandler," I said, managing, I think, some dignity despite the fact that I was barely touching the floor, "Hyman Brandler."

"You're Noel's friend?" his wife asked, and her few words, her smile were conspiratorial; in that instant she had somehow assured me that she knew his grossness, my plight. "I've met so few of his wartime—"

"Just a buddy!" Noel shouted across my attempt to speak. "He made five bucks for me."

"I—"

"You nothing!" he cried with a hostility I could not understand; he had released his hold at last, but had wedged me securely between his body and the wall. "I took one look at you—*one* look, mind you, in that line. It was in the old Armory, and I said to the guy behind me, 'I'll give you five to one that *this* joker gets rejected.' 'Hell,' this guy says, 'in this man's army, if he can *walk*—' "

"Noel!" his wife interrupted, feeling perhaps that so crude an onslaught might embarrass me. "Noel, we're supposed to—"

I may, indeed, have blushed. I do not have a bad limp, but it is noticeable, particularly when I am distraught. The examining psychiatrist told me that very day that I *want* the limp, that I cling to it as at once a kind of revenge against my father and a punishment of myself. I find it, removed now from those painful circumstances, and as a theory, not improbable, though long since I have learned to face the truth: my father had intended only to punish me in the

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way he had been taught was right, for he is an honorable, and was then, though it is difficult now to believe, a passionate man. "You'll excuse me, Mrs.—"

"Johnson. Ann Johnson."

"Mrs. Johnson," I went on. "I know you have other plans—" She was, and I speak with some authority seeing many women in the way of business, a person of unusual charm; under what surely must have been exacerbating provocation, she maintained that crisp cleanliness, at once cool and exciting, that one does not hope to find outside the ads in women's magazines, attained only for an instant and before cameras.

"No!" Noel cried out in his immense rusty voice. "Stay! Stay! I'll buy you a drink!" He moved forward, pushing me closer to his wife, and roaring as if at the best of jokes. "4F," he explained, "4F. You'll like him, an intellectual—"

"Just a shoe salesman," I murmured in pointless self-abnegation, which I resented the next instant. It was like facing one's father: the vague sense of guilt, the inexplicable onslaught of what can only be hatred. What had I done, what *was* I that justified his rage?

"Intellectual, my intellectual buddy!" Disorganized and frightened, I had talked that day as openly as a child to everyone. "My 4F intellectual buddy. You'll have a lot in common with her—" He pointed clumsily at his wife. "You two can talk about literature—" It was perhaps himself he was mocking; he was not drunk, though it would have been comforting to think so, merely—impossible.

"Timothy!" Mrs. Johnson called out with evident pleasure, as the day's speaker sauntered toward our intolerable interview. "Mr. Brandler, this is Timothy Cargill. Wasn't he *exciting*!"

As Timothy thanked her, reddening slightly, Noel drew me toward him with an imperative hand. "Used to room at our house," he explained, with the merest pretense of not wishing to be overheard. "Got rid of him. Teaches at the Junior College. *Charming* fellow!" We waved his hand, to make sure I did not take his adjective literally, in an exaggerated effeminate gesture. "Cargill, here's another intellectual!" He slapped my back again grossly, but somehow with less conviction; I had the preposterous momentary impression that he was frightened.

Quite close, Timothy Cargill smelled improbably of lilacs; I

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was aware at first only of something indefinably anomalous in the impact of his nearness, something that suggested the gentle presence of clean old ladies and that sorted oddly with the series of bitter curves that composed his face. He smiled at me briefly.

"Smells pretty, don't he?" Noel remarked in his enormous undertone. His wife did not respond, or even seem to look at him, but, I do not know quite how to say it, the distance between them sensibly increased.

"Ann," Cargill said, apparently unruffled, "your blouse, that color! With your hair, your eyes, it's a—*discovery!* You're another Columbus. Don't you think so, Noel?"

Even the obviously inappropriate name seemed in his mouth a precise insult, and the mocking question hung in our midst, unanswered. Before Timothy's ambiguity of sex, Noel's masculinity seemed somehow shameful, an inexcusable crudity. No one knew how to begin again, until Timothy, more bored certainly than embarrassed, fumbled for a moment in his pockets. "Mr. Brandler, we're fellow—criminals. Do you have a cigarette?"

As I shook my head regretfully (it would have bolstered my self-esteem to have been able to make some real response to anything in that situation), Mrs. Johnson held out a full silver case, offering it first to Cargill, and then, with an odd little bow of ironic sympathy, to me. In a strange day, it was not the strangest thing that occurred, but remembering now in tranquillity the whole adventure, I am most dismayed at the small folly that followed; when routine collapses, it seems to warn me, anything can happen. I took a cigarette, a light proffered by Timothy, and had the lit cigarette between my lips before I remembered that I do not smoke!

Mrs. Johnson, whom I have never seen since (and indeed, what occasion could ever draw us together), I will always remember at that moment, watching me, casual yet somehow uneasy, though she could not possibly have suspected my plight, for I smoked that cigarette down to a stub, even inhaling, lest I expose myself, with some fortitude until my eyes watered and I feared for a while that I would be sick. It seemed the least I could do for her, and I feel it in my somewhat uneventful life as a chivalric, almost a courtly, instant.

"Timothy, you were good," Mrs. Johnson was saying when I

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was able again to hear, "*really* good! Of course, I know very little about Plato—"

"Plato—a fascist! Socrates—a worse fascist!" A middle-aged, untidy man had thrust between our shoulders an emphatic head, something just short of madness in the frantic eyes, the compulsive facial gestures. A moment later his body followed. "Goodman, a plumber!" he declared himself in his spasmodic phrasing, and sensing our bewilderment, "Goodman—the name. Plumber—the profession." And he added, to make sure we had not forgotten the occasion of his materialization, "Plato—a fascist!"

"You'll have to define your terms, Mr. Goodman," Timothy rebuked him with the mild disdain of the schoolteacher.

"Terms!" The word apparently enraged him beyond control. "An academician! Listen, young man—when the Republicans took from Franco Toledo, where do you think was the last stand from the fascist militia, *hah?*" He stopped dramatically, his eyes plunging from one of us to another in desperate patience. "No answer. I, Goodman, I'll tell you. In the University. In the office from the Philosophy Department. Terms!" He subsided into a furious and triumphant silence.

"That's no answer. Answer Mr. Cargill—he said define your terms!" It was a new voice, truculent, not quite certain, and looking up I saw that the young man who had sat beside me in the Reading Room, the one with the extraordinary neck, had joined us. It seemed to me strange that he had appeared on so trite a phrase, like anyone. I wondered if, perhaps, he were wholly unconscious of his strange skill.

Goodman jerked his head forward in violent recognition and disgust. "*You!* You, I know, Professor Simone." The boy, it appeared, taught Litèrature occasionally as a substitute in our High Schools. "Back to your Ivory Tower!"

"Answer him, that's all," Simone persisted, almost whining, "just answer him."

I do not recall quite how it happened, but a few moments later we were all (except Mrs. Johnson who had gone off saying something about a baby-sitter) in a beer-joint around the corner, screaming at each other. For the first time in my life, I had left the Library without pausing on the steps to permit myself a full awareness of it:

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the peace from which, for a little, I departed, and to which I would return. Noel held me tight with one hand; he must have grabbed me in the street to prevent, God knows why, my slipping off, and now he had simply forgotten his grasp. He did not join our discussion ever, but would squeeze my arm, when something obscurely moved him, inside his immense unheeding clasp until I almost screamed in pain. It was his money, a crumpled wad he laid on the table before him, that bought our beers, and he watched fiercely to be sure he was getting his money's worth; we performed like beasts, incapable of knowing what would please the onlooker.

At first Timothy talked, quickly, delicately, but with only half-concealed ennui, lapsing quite soon, or pretending to, into drunkenness, and in the end I was the only one who persisted against Goodman's spasms of abuse and anguish. Simone would follow our points with great nods of agreement, or noiseless expostulations of dissent, fingering his neck, and sweating profusely, but his only spoken comment was the interjection with which he had begun. "You didn't answer him! That's no answer. That's—" and he would, apparently with the sense of having contributed something, sink mumbling beneath the tide of argument. Speech is for me customarily a temptation rigorously suppressed, but that evening the few beers, the sense of an outrageous holiday, betrayed me into indulgence, an orgy of words, while Noel, remote, bitterly compelled me, his great head cupped in one hairy paw, the other still clutching me. He listened, not in the contempt I would have expected, but avidly as if at any moment we might solve the riddle he could not himself even pose.

I remember clearly only the end of our talk. "Love!" Goodman had cried, and it was somehow the point toward which the long evening had been bearing us, far past supper and vaguely hungry, but held by some more ultimate hunger to that table, those words. Only Noel watched in silence from the furry ambush of his hand, unable to afford drunkenness or speech; his head moved from speaker to speaker intently and pain sat without conviction in his eyes. "Love—a lie! Love your neighbor! Love! Charity! These words, I hate. Tell the truth, who can we love? A neighbor? Not even our wives, our children, not even ourselves. A certain camaraderie, yes, allowances we make—yes—"

"But look now," I tried to begin, "in the *Symposium*—"

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"Plato!" he screamed. "Be frank, now. Love each other we don't, but a little frankness we can afford. Plato, what is he really? A fascist, I won't say. A bugger, no?" He pointed a violent finger at Timothy. "Professor, about such things you should know. I ask you—a bugger? Am I right?"

Timothy, obscurely offended, only sniffed at him, touched his hair in an elegant gesture of indifference; his face was red, meant nothing. I answered for him, I who ordinarily and on principle, prefer reticence, "It doesn't matter. We begin sometimes in the flesh, sometimes by-pass it, but the important thing is somehow and at last to achieve what escapes the definition of the flesh—" I had the sense of speaking for once incisively, to the point; it was as if I had merely imagined the rejoinder in my room. Noel had moved his hand, my aching arm downward in a baffled gesture of protest.

"Love!" Goodman could bear it no longer; he jumped up and down in his place. "Theology! What do I see when you say this word: the priests, the banners, and in the hands—guns! Love! A word that kills people. It's such a—so—so—" He almost said "Christian," but at the last moment checked it under my glance (we were the only two Jews present, and beneath our dispute he trusted me to guide him). "—so Evangelical! Lo-o-o-o ve, this fake sweetness and the women slit up the—"

"Crap!" Noel had risen, reluctantly, but confessing as he heaved us both upward that there was, after all, here too, no wisdom, no hope. He seemed still quite sober.

Goodman was not through, but clutching at Noel across the table, he cried, "Do *I* need love? In *my* life is there love? In this jungle, this America, a word only—Who needs it?"

"Crap," Noel said again, dragging me toward the door. "Let's go."

"Stay a little," Goodman shrieked, "Late it's not. We'll talk—another beer—stay!"

Noel was plunging outward faster now, annoyed, kicking a chair out of his way. Timothy, I saw looking backward over my shoulder was asleep; Simone—I had not missed him—was not in sight. "Good night!" I yelled.

"Come better to my house. Beautiful, I can't say it is—a few miserable sticks furniture—" There was the pulse of an uncon-

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trollable urgency in Goodman's voice. "I have a couple bottles beer on ice—"

"Good night," I cried again, fighting for my footing, almost at the door. "Goodman, good night!"

"You'll come next week. We'll all meet here after the discussion. A regular thing. A good talk—" his voice trembled toward silence. "Brandler, you at least—" he called after us, without certainty, and looking backward through the plate-glass door, I saw him for the last time, shaking Timothy's elegant dumb shoulder, furiously and in vain.

"Crap!" Noel shouted at the closed door, and "Crap!" once more as the dark autumnal air bitterly assailed our hot damp faces. "That guy's nuts!"

"Yes," I said, "he's really nuts." I felt somehow as if I had betrayed, assenting so easily, his last appeal, and more, had undone in the casual judgment, my father, myself. Surely, I had more in common with the abandoned Jew than this gross, violent hulk. "He's lonely," I added quickly, "lonely."

"Lonely," Noel said quite softly; it was the first time I had heard his voice in anything less than a shout. "*He's* lonely! Holy Christ." In what was surely anguish, he released my arm at last, but it was no longer possible for me to leave him.

"That fairy," he said with the air of continuing, as if we had been, all the time not knowing it, on that very subject, and he waved backward contemptuously toward the saloon we were leaving, "that goddamn literary—who the hell even knows if he *is* a fairy? He looks like one, don't he?" We had moved together toward his parked car; for me there was no question of choice, and as we drove off through the booming lighted streets I did not even trouble to notice where we were headed. "Well, don't he?"

"Doesn't he *what*?" It was hard for me to stay awake; the strange exhilaration to which I had yielded blurred around its edges to sleep.

"Look like a fairy to you?"

"Who?"

"Holy Christ, who? Cargill. Timothy Cargill."

"Could be," I said, still not quite certain what was at stake and unwilling to offend him. Noel didn't seem satisfied, but drove

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in furious silence toward darker streets lined with trees and the pale shadows of private houses. Once, feeling I had not met his challenge, I said again, "Could be," but he would not even turn toward me.

"My house," he said finally, in vast disgust, pulling up to the curb, but he made no move to get out. "Look," he said patiently, "you can't be drunk on six beers. You read books. I'm not a dolt myself. I read things, too. Christ, it's no *crime* to read the *Saturday Evening Post*. But this Proust, this Joyce—they beat me. What the hell!"

I understood. I am not used to the messiness of such situations in real life, but the problems of fiction are not without their own complexity, and it is impossible to deal with them for long without acquiring a certain acuity. "You are trying to tell me that this Timothy has interested your wife in Proust and Joyce and you don't like it?"

"Hell, that ain't the half of it. Let her read what she likes, it's a free country. But she looks at me as if—as if she's *sorry* for me. I mean, when I want her she's not *there*. Not really there." He looked at me without hope, poking a thick contemptuous finger at my chest. "Look! Look at this arm. I'm *there*, I've always been there. What a woman wants I've got. Hell, you wouldn't know."

I laughed nervously, not knowing what to say and wishing I were in my own room preparing for bed, warming my final cup of coffee on the single electric burner. We got out of the car, Noel leaping for the pavement as if it were a smoking beach; I half expected him to shout, "This is it!" and giggled sharply in the dark, but if he heard me he made no sign.

Through a slightly open window, music was coming toward us, thick tangled atonal chords, somewhat absurd in that quiet suburban street. It is not the kind of music I would myself have chosen, preferring (I have a small record-player in my room) the gentler resolutions of the seventeenth century, but I was struck for the moment by its sense of conflict: the player fighting the genius of his instrument, the development, the logic of melody. It was a triumph of the will, raw, showy, *there*; Noel should have liked it, but he didn't get it.

"You see," he said to me as if it were some flagrant evidence of infidelity. "You see! He lends her those albums," and opening the door, he bellowed, "Shut it off!"

She must have turned it off as we entered, for the room rang

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with the sudden silence as he bent, ineptly, to kiss her, an ill-assured gesture of possession before which, a little, she seemed to flinch. I could not be sure, for seeing me she turned what reflex of repulsion she had betrayed into a mock gesture of horror. "Strong drink!" she said, rolling the r's melodramatically. "You smell like a brewery!" and to me, "Why, it's Mr. Brandler. Come in." People do not usually remember my name, and so I entered with a small glow of satisfaction. I am accustomed to watch people closely, for in the shoe business and in writing alike, accurate psychological discrimination is indispensable, and so I did not miss the automatic movement of Mrs. Johnson's hand to her forehead; just above and beside the left eye, powdered carefully but visible in the fall of light, there was a bruise.

"Would either or both of you like something to eat?" she asked.

"No!" Noel bellowed, glaring down the declaration of hunger that trembled on my lips.

We sat in silence for a moment and then, "Talk!" he said, looking from me to his wife. *"Talk,* why don't you. I've brought you a real live nickel-plated broken-down intellectual. Do your stuff!"

I looked in misery at the floor, incapable of speech, not even daring again to turn my eyes toward Mrs. Johnson. I will not tell you what fantastic declarations and gestures proposed themselves to me in the succeeding moments of terrible silence.

Noel was walking up and down the room with a jarring stride that kept the bric-a-brac trembling."Talk, goddamn it—and don't tell me I don't give my wife everything her little heart desires. A real live intellectual, pickled in six beers, and I brought him back singlehanded. Go ahead—talk about *literature."* He began to laugh, pounding his chest. "Maybe I embarrass you?"

"Noel," she began, without, I am sure, anything to say really in mind, just to be speaking, but just then a baby began to cry somewhere in the house. "Noel—the baby—"

"He did not appear to hear her. "Talk," he cried, "why don't you *talk*!"

She tried again. "Noel—the baby—"

"Well, take care of it, damn you. I'm going out." He grabbed our coats from the chair where he had dropped them and was at the door.

"Good night, dear," she called, near tears I was sure, though

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her voice betrayed nothing. "Good night, Mr. Brandler." An uncustomary access of rage shook my body, and I looked hopelessly down at my meager arms. In the car, where I sat as far from Noel as I could, he turned on me ferociously. "If you were wondering, I beat her. I like it! You should try it sometime."

"I— I—"

"Shut up!" he said.

I find it difficult to remember more than snatches of the rest of that night; why I did not somehow leave him I have never been able properly to explain to myself. We drank with a single-mindedness and fury I would not have believed possible, moving from place to place and in each of them Noel seemed, at least to my wavering eye, no less sober, though sometimes he would thump his gross resonant body without mercy, roaring, "A man, goddamn it—a *man*. No one has to look twice at me!" For an hour at a time he would talk to me gently, pleading with me not to leave him, gripping my shoulders with his brute frantic hands, and then, in an inexplicable surge of malice, scream at me over a drink, "Drink it down, goddamn it! I'm paying for it." But when I would raise the glass to my lips, he would thump my back suddenly, making me splutter and choke, while the whole bar rang with drunken laughter.

When the last saloon had closed, we went into a hamburger stand for a cup of coffee; there was in the place, in the shining silver urns that mocked our faces, the quiet whirr of the ventilating fans and the soft sizzling of frying hamburgers, a kind of peace that seemed to invade even Noel. He sat on the stool that beneath his great hams looked absurdly small, his head in his hands, that martyred, inarticulate face relaxed over the almost antiseptic whiteness of the counter; he looked like sleep and I dared for the first time to yield to my own weariness.

A couple of high-school kids barged in behind us, loud in the hushed drone of the place, letting a wedge of cold into the somnolent warmth of our refuge. "What a babe," one of them was saying, "yah-hoooo!" and "Quiet, shmo," the other. I could imagine without turning around the terrible pinched cockiness of their faces, the skin marred with hair and pimples, the meaningless canny eyes that did not yet know they would some day die. They had left the door open and a mean blast, chill with the last of darkness, swept in on us

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"Shut the door," Noel growled, not looking up.

The kids did not move or answer.

"Shut the door!" Noel roared.

"Things are tough all over," one of them said in a scared nasty voice.

"I'll shut it," I offered, fearing a senseless row when we had seemed so near peace.

"The hell you will—"

"Shut it, Chick," one of the kids was saying. "What do we want, trouble?"

"Quiet, jerk!" Chick sneered, more assured now, and he began to hum, "He's too fat for me. . . . "

"You little bastard," Noel said lurching toward him, "Shut it!"

"Make me," the kid said.

I suppose there is a way of dealing with such situations, but my life has not prepared me for it; before I quite knew what was happening, the two of them were outside, and before I, or indeed even the other kid or the counterman, could intervene, it was all over. Noel had cocked a meaty fist but before he could get set on his shaky legs, the kid had kicked him in the groin—hard—and run. I could hear the other boy pounding after him, his voice clear in that absolute hush just before the first morning streetcar runs, "What the hell's with you—an old man!"

Noel was sitting on the ground, screaming and cursing, tears running scandalously across his great face; he yielded himself to them almost voluptuously, as if they were a satisfaction he had never dreamed. It was something of a task for me and the counterman to heave him to his feet, half carry, half drag him to the waiting car. It would have been, I suppose, no more than an adequate revenge to abandon him then and there, but as the pain eased off, it left him all at once atrociously drunk, and I could not, in all conscience, do it. I fished the car keys out of his pocket and drove him to my room, though I do not drive well under any circumstances, and he would pummel me from time to time, screaming, "Man—man—maybe he's not—*There!*"

My efforts to revive him with coffee were quite vain, and when he slipped at last to the floor from the chair in which I had propped him, I left him there and went to bed.

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Sometime after dawn I woke to find him trying to batter his way out through the door I am always careful to lock. "Why don't you try it open?" I said, and then regretting my poor irony, "Are you all right?"

"All right," he muttered with some effort, and turning the lock, fell face forward across the sill; but he got up again with astonishing agility and turned at the head of the stairs. I could sense from the careful adjustment of his body, the slowness of his speech that he felt himself on the verge of some great revelation. "Man," he said, "Love—A pansy of the fields. Holy Christ!"

I do not know how, or indeed if, he ever got home. Needless to say, I never went to another of the discussion meetings, and in a week or two I had achieved again something of my old equilibrium, though, to tell the precise truth, I have never been able to summon up quite the old quota of vigor and resolve. Each morning I stand on the stone steps, ascend eagerly to where the tables, long and polished, await my coming, but I am not quite the same. With so marginal a spiritual economy as mine, such splurges are paid for through a lifetime of insufficiency.

Next day I discovered, where Noel had taken his last tumble, a complete upper plate, which he has never, of course, returned to claim. I use it to this day as a somewhat macabre paperweight. The occasional girls, who, by necessity, I bring into my room, are sometimes amused finding the plate, but learning it is not mine, quickly lose interest. To me, however, the denture is, besides a trophy and a warning, an unflagging joke, quite real though difficult to define.

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Meyer Schapiro

FROMENTIN AS A CRITIC

The Old Masters of Belgium and Holland is the first and perhaps the only book of its kind: a critical study of painting by an accomplished artist who is also a first-rate writer. As the author of the sensitive novel *Dominique* and of *A Summer in the Sahara,* a masterpiece of travel-writing, Eugène Fromentin has an established place in French letters. Other novelists and poets have also written well on painting, but they have lacked Fromentin's knowledge of the craft, and the few great painters who have left observations on their art have been unable or unconcerned to give them a decided literary form. But Fromentin's distinction does not lie simply in the fact that he combined the painter's experience with the writer's skill. His book, which speaks so revealingly of the brush-stroke, the palette and the complicity of tones, is not a learned, technical work; it has little of the jargon of the studios or the so-called secrets of the old masters, and where it tries to expound so special a matter as light "values" or contrast, it is not wholly clear. Fromentin wrote that he wanted his readers to forget that the author was a painter; he preferred the role of a "pure dilettante" in the original noble sense of the word, as if to free himself from practical aims while contemplating the works of the past. Perhaps he felt also an aristocratic constraint in talking of a métier. In the end, fortunately, he could not divest himself altogether of his professional habit. Only a man for whom painting was a life-preoccupation could look at pictures with his minute discernment. More than in its craft knowledge, the virtue of the book is in the sustained attitude of discrimination and judgment, resting on keen, tireless observation of the fabric of the painting as a sensory matter, like the musician's attentiveness to sounds, but penetrating at the same time with a wonderful power

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of sympathy into the artist's personality or moral nature, to use Fromentin's old-fashioned term. His exact notation of qualities, tones, rapports of colors and forms, is never just descriptive or analytic; it flows out of an instantaneous savoring of the whole which is prolonged and tested by further scrutiny of the work and aims also at a truer vision of the artist's physiognomy. There is nothing comparable for intensity of perception in the entire literature of art criticism.

Add to this a particular eloquence and devotion, a tone of vibrant enthusiasm, which art criticism had scarcely known before the modern period and which corresponds to an almost religious sentiment of the dignity of art.

Long before Fromentin, writers had seen that a painting is a personal object, but this insight had remained an unexplored generality. In *The Old Masters of Belgium and Holland* it becomes concrete, evidential, intimate, a field of problems and profound searching, as in the beautiful pages on Rubens and Ruisdael. Here, through repeated observations, we are made to see beyond doubt that the touch and the sensory stuff of a picture are spiritual things of the greatest consequence. The *facture* is a product of feeling, a result of the whole psychic disposition of the artist. What he does beyond his instinct, through acquired skill and calculation, depends on instinct too; even the artist's reason is marked with his character and appears in this book as a personal trait. Everything in the work of art—the attitude to the subject, the execution, palette, and forms —belongs then to the individual and is an expressive end as well as a means. This total conviction, with all that is vague and problematic in it, gives life to Fromentin's analyses and judgments.

The close vision of a work becomes an effort to relive its creation; the artist, with his temperament and process, emerges in almost physical intimacy. What a delight for Fromentin to find at Mechlin a freshly cleaned, unframed Rubens! "Thanks to circumstances," as he says, "I was enabled to examine it closely and to follow the workmanship just as if Rubens were painting before my eyes." Studying the works of the past he strives to make himself contemporary with them as actions of a spiritual moment and a mood. This tie with the individual occasion (distinct from the personality which is something more constant), very difficult if not impossible to re-

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establish in old painting, he had discovered in poetry long before. In his novel, where he could draw directly upon his memories, he had described with a precision, uncommon in such matters at that time, the genesis of a poem in the thought of his hero while walking, and noted the sudden gestation of rhythms and images, a description that anticipates in its principle a similar account by Paul Valéry.

Fromentin's search for the personality in the painting sometimes suggests a scientific aim, as if he were looking for psychological laws. These are presupposed, of course, in any statement that explains the quality of a work by the character of its maker. Fromentin undertakes even to reconstitute the little known character of Ruisdael, in discreet touches and questions, from the peculiarities of his art. A painting, he thinks, is an infallible clue to the state of mind of its author at the moment of creation. And in this attempt he precedes, like other critics, the experimental psychologist who studies the individual aspect of motor behavior and fantasy.

But more important to Fromentin than genetic or diagnostic insight is the direct vision of the work itself as stamped with the qualities of a great individual. He can speak then of the execution or colors or arrangement as noble, generous, passionate or candid, as possessing, in short, the attributes of a superior humanity. Since painting in his time no longer represented ideal types of man, having lost its older connection with religion and myth, and the value of art (even of the past) was measured by the subtlety of the craft and the delight in colored pigment, this rapturous perception of the human, with all its modalities, in the sensory matter of the work was an important revelation; it guaranteed to what might otherwise have seemed little more than a virtuoso craftsmanship the possibility of a profound expression of a hidden personal world.

Throughout Fromentin's book we sense the full humanity of art and the critic's position as a man. His enthusiasm for Rubens is a judgment of a quality of human life. Fromentin has an image of man's greatness; he throbs and kneels when he encounters it in a painting. It is both in the conception of the subject and in the execution. It is the face and gesture of Saint Francis at his last communion and it is in the colors and brushwork of the naked body of Christ. Only a great man could have conceived and produced these things. The harmony of tones is matched by the moral perfection of

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a gesture. The interest of Fromentin lies in his power to make us see that the highest human values are involved in a patch of color, the bend of a line.

Notice also that Fromentin is not satisfied to judge that a work is good or bad. Few of the pictures he admires are perfect. He is too much a painter who has struggled with his canvas and suffered from the consciousness of its failings, even when it has been acclaimed a masterpiece, to approach the works of others with an all-or-none principle. Before Rubens he remains critical, attentive to the differences between one part and another. He sees the painter as a human genius of uneven powers, subject to the endlessly complex conditions of work. In a great painting the conception may surpass the execution, one figure may be masterly, another more relaxed in drawing, and all this variability of an artist arises from his character. Comparing Rubens' *Elevation on the Cross* with the *Descent,* Fromentin is able to say convincingly that the first is more progressive, more truly Rubens, but the other is more complete, more perfectly realized; or that his *Adoration of the Magi* in Antwerp is less accomplished than the one in Brussels, yet is the final expression of his knowledge of color and his dexterity. This is a profoundly objective kind of criticism which sees the modalities of an artist's achievement and is able to discern the differences not only between one work and another, but also between the aspects or parts of the same creation. It is what we miss sometimes in Baudelaire, a critic of more youthful spirit, who is more imaginative and intense in his appreciations, but takes the whole production of an artist *en bloc*: Delacroix is for him a God whose least fragment is a masterpiece and in whose great pictures every touch carries the same force and necessity. We feel in his grandiose pages on Delacroix a will to adoration, the fulfilment of a desire for the perfect. The attentiveness of Fromentin is more searching and perhaps in the long run more revealing; the imperfections he discovers are at times as instructive as the perfect parts; they belong no less to the personality and help us to understand it better and to see what an accomplishment are its unquestionable successes. And when Fromentin comes to a work which is for him an achievement of transcendent greatness in spite of its defects, he rises gradually from a mood of grave inspection and testing to an exalted lyrical praise, symphonic in its expansive,

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climactic movement, as in the beautiful concluding page on Rubens' *Elevation on the Cross,* where he compares the painting to an ode, then to a sublime ode, and finally fixes upon one part, the head of Christ, as its culminating and supreme strophe.

Fromentin's conviction about the personal, moral nature of painting is imposed upon us and becomes almost self-evident through his astounding suppleness in describing and judging the works. And here we must recognize too that his calling as a writer counted for something in the substance as well as style of his criticism. That unity of sensation and feeling, which is basic for his critical method, is also in his time a principle of imaginative writing, which represents the exterior world through a reacting sensibility. In the novel and poetry of the nineteenth century, and most of all in France, the inner life of the individual, whether a character in a story or the writer himself, became the central object and was revealed through the same refined imaging of experience that Fromentin employs in order to characterize the old paintings. He was, in fact, among the first to introduce into art criticism the standards of observation and of expression of sentiment developed by the French novelists and poets—the requirement of a direct encounter with the object, nuanced statement of feeling, and a rapid, flexible prose with a syntax and rich sensory language that could evoke the observed and the observer together, without dissolving the object in the sensation or mood. To write with strokes or touches was the ideal of a personal style. Painters also shared this aim; Impressionism was for a time the most advanced model of its accomplishment. We touch here on a point where the mutual action of writing and painting is so complex that it becomes impossible to disengage the effects of the two arts upon each other. Since the visual was the highest example of direct experience of the outer world and in this directness was affirmed the free activity of the self, modern painting took on a new charm for the poet as an art in which the subjective and the external were fused. As a young man, while still a student, Fromentin wrote: "I have a rather active interior life, I absorb enormously through the eyes."

As a piece of writing, *The Old Masters of Belgium and Holland* is original in form, recalling at the same time the Salon review, the travel book, the critical essay and the private journal. Like the Salons of Diderot and Baudelaire, it deals with what is immediately visible,

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the works exhibited in a particular place. Like the travel book, it follows an itinerary and conveys the impressions and feelings of Fromentin on a journey in the summer of 1875. It adds to these some vigorous pages of theory, it is concerned with principles and makes excursions into history and aesthetics. It builds up distinct images of artistic personalities. Finally, there is something of the intimate journal in its avowals, hesitations, enthusiasms and regrets, its monologue of artistic experience.

This variety of statement enables Fromentin to be more fully himself and to draw on more of his powers and interests than if he had adopted any one of the established forms of writing on art. It is a flexible medium for the complex culture and personality of the author. The restriction to what he has seen on a single trip and in Paris entails, of course, a disadvantage for a critic. It means that he must ignore important pictures of Rubens and Rembrandt in other countries although they were familiar to him through reproductions. And he cannot confront the work of an artist in its entirety to check his single judgments against a larger conception or in a perspective of the whole.

Nevertheless, the limitation was also an advantage; for it was precisely by restricting himself to the directly encountered paintings that Fromentin could liberate the criticism of past art from the established formalities and bookishness. We can see this better by a comparison with Delacroix's writings on art. In the great romantic's note-books there are long passages of the purest, most acute perception; but the articles on Gros, Poussin, Prud'hon and others that he published during his lifetime are written in another style: they are full-dress essays with much historical, biographic matter in a tone of public speech; the best qualities of his journal appear only faintly in these conventional works. Fromentin is the first writer to give to published criticism of the old masters the spontaneous personal character of this hitherto private, yet highly objective, discernment of art which must have been practiced by many artists. His relation to Delacroix is like that of Impressionist painting to its predecessors; it treats as self-sufficient and valid what had formerly been regarded as only a preparatory sketch or note, and it carries further the implications of that direct approach. Fromentin introduced as a governing principle into the studied criticism the immediacy of the

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unworked perception, while preserving all that came from analysis and prolonged meditation. His book is an early example of what might be called *plein-air* criticism, although it is still tied to certain traditional theories and norms. I do not mean that he is an impressionistic critic; with his marvellous sharpness of vision, his immediate sensations are already set for judgment; his impressions are a starting-point and recurrent matter for reflection; he aims at exact observation and requires a constant testing of judgments. His belief that "there are great laws in a little object" demands of the writer on art a probing acuity and intelligence that we do not associate with the impressionistic critic.

Fromentin's book is an account of experiences rather than of impressions, or of impressions which have the impact and importance of experiences. Since he is a man who lives through his eyes and through the memory of what he has seen, impressions are for him never "fugitive," but are tenaciously held; he really bites into things with his eyes. It should be remembered also that Fromentin belongs to the period of transition from the engraved to the photographic reproduction, before the present abundance of illustrated books on art, so that few of the works that he is to see are familiar to him; he is more impelled therefore to rely on the direct experience of the painting than the modern student who has always the possibility of carrying away with him after a rapid glance at the originals the photographs of everything that has struck his eye, for future meditation—a factor, it may be, in the frequent indifference to fine qualities of surface and color in modern writing on art which gives so much weight to the schematisms of pattern and line most available in black-and-white reproductions. Like an Impressionist painter who tries to complete his work before the object in one sitting—an ideal that demands the utmost concentration—Fromentin includes in this book many of his original notes unworked. It is most interesting to compare the final version of his text with his note-book and letters. They show that he often shifted his views, but some of these changes were recorded already in the notes as second observations or corrections jotted down before the paintings themselves. Seeing Rubens' *Elevation on the Cross* and *Descent* again and again, his judgment vacillates in an extraordinary way. Where Fromentin feels doubts, he returns to the object, scrutinizes it more fully, strives to detach his view from old

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habits and opinions and struggles with judgment painfully, until he has reached a point of rest.

What is astonishing and yet on reflection perfectly right is that the book is the fruit of a trip less than a month long in the Low Countries. There stand behind it, of course, the thought of a lifetime and a habit of judgment formed in almost forty years as a painter. One of its main virtues is that it reads like a report of a month's journey, but a month of most intense and concentrated vision. If it has something of the quality of a travel book, it is by an explorer with a special purpose whose attention is fixed on his own objects, who knows his domain with a sovereign expertness, and in encountering certain things for the first time, brings to bear on them his entire personality as well as his knowledge of the field. Much that he has to say about Flemish and Dutch painting had been said before, at least in a general way; but in Fromentin's experience there is a liveness and sharp edge of appetite which we rarely if ever find in the older writers. It is the first book on art that he has written and is therefore a fresh enterprise, uninfluenced by a routine of composition (although we suspect that he has included in it some ideas that belong to an older stage of his thought). The chapters, designed in a seemingly formless way, with occasional repetitions, correspond for the most part to the order of the journey. And to maintain this direct vision and informality, he also describes the towns as he sees them, in finely nuanced, picturesque word strokes which call up images resembling certain of the paintings that he is to discover there and confirm for the reader both the local, rooted character of the art and the singlemindedness of the author who looks at the world and art with the same appreciating eyes.

Before undertaking this work, Fromentin considered whether he had anything really new to say. He hesitated for some time before committing himself to the task. The art of the Low Countries had recently been the object of important studies and now seemed an exhausted topic. Taine had included in his *Philosophy of Art* a dazzling section on Flemish and Dutch painting, asserting the influence of race and milieu upon this art in a rich, highly articulated prose. Thoré-Burger, a radical exile from France, one of the keenest critics of the time, had travelled in the Netherlands and reported in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* his discoveries of works by unknown or little

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known artists: Vermeer and Karel Fabritius, who interested the younger painters for qualities congenial to the aims of modern art; he wrote also on Frans Hals, a painter admired as an ancestor of the scandalous Edouard Manet. Fromentin wished to avoid competition with these writers. After reading their works, he concluded that on one point everything was yet to be said; there existed no truly critical book on the Flemish and Dutch masters, at least nothing corresponding to his own insight into their character as artists. He recognized the interest of the new historical approach which had enlarged enormously the knowledge about the artists and their age. The personality of Rembrandt had emerged for the first time from the documents discovered by Dutch students. But his intention from the beginning was not to write a historical or systematic work. Rather than search in fields in which he could be at best an intelligent but ignorant amateur, he wisely held to the ground of his own experience.

Yet with this restriction of the field he is hardly narrow. In his certainty that the artistic fabric of a work is the final matter of judgment, he does not exclude other sides of art as irrelevant to critical decision. His practice is broader and more attractive than his theory. If only the artistic counts, why so much trouble to envision the personality behind it? To see the beauty of a Ruisdael surely doesn't require that we imagine the artist's melancholy, his solitary rambling and hidden wound. Yet the perception of the personality in the work may be a means of discovery of the fabric, a key to certain nuances and accords, closed to an eye which is unaware of the humanity embodied in the colors.

Fromentin also gave to the subject of a painting more weight than his theory would allow. In his chapter on the subject in Dutch painting, where he noted the rarity of the anecdote and the historical theme in this art, he affirmed with the usual positiveness of modern critics that only the painting as an artistic work mattered. Flaubert admired this defense of pure painting as an important lesson for artists. If, however, the chapter had not been written and we undertook to discover through Fromentin's reactions to pictures precisely what counted for him, we would quickly learn that the conception of the themes and their meanings were important, that he sometimes responded to them with emotion, and that certain kinds of painting could be judged only in relation to the subject. In speaking of por-

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traiture, he requires always that the nature of the sitter be expressed in the image; he explains the inferiority of Rubens' portraits to his other works by the painter's robust extraversion which made it impossible for him to concentrate on the inner life of others. On the other hand, if the *Saint George* "is the pure essence of his genius," Fromentin believes that this is due to Rubens' affection for the subject. It is remarkable with how much pathos Fromentin describes religious painting—whether of Rubens or Rembrandt or Memling; some of the finest pages in the book are about the Christian sentiment of works like the *Last Communion of Saint Francis,* which are seen mainly from this point of view; their greatness as art appears as a moral or spiritual achievement more than as a triumph of plastic invention. It is clear that if Fromentin condemned the concern with subject as inartistic, he exempted from this criticism the religious and the epic theme for which he preserved the traditional respect. His attitude toward the theme of curiosity is not truly the modern one; he maintained rather the hierarchy of subjects taught by the old classical academicians. He could praise the still-life painter Vollon as a superior artist but only with the qualification that his genre was inferior. Like others of his time, he failed so see that although still-life and landscape were not subject-matters which had to be deciphered and "understood," they embodied nevertheless an attitude to things no less significant philosophically than the religious or historical themes, and that like these they were individualized by the artists, so that one could discover in the choice of objects by Chardin a distinct personality and a relation to his mode of painting.

One cannot say then of Fromentin that he is a purely formal or aesthetic critic. His whole culture is engaged in seeing. Psychology, religion, history interest him too, although none of these, when seen through the work of art, approaches in importance the individual aesthetic fabric of the work. But where they help to illuminate the latter, they belong necessarily to the critic's domain. In Fromentin's book we do not feel that they are simply a "background" to an interpretation, a set of more or less relevant facts that he has coldly excerpted from books. They are matters of conviction and high curiosity, of which he sees the human and poetic side; they have occupied his thought for some time, although they have never been for him an object of research. He is no theoretical mind, however,

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and does not try to bring his ideas about the artist's personality, work and social experience into harmony. If he believes, for example, that "it is impossible to talk about *men* (his emphasis) and really to understand them, without knowing their milieu" (he says this, without qualification, in a letter written during his trip in the Low Countries), he applies this principle in treating the Dutch school and the great Flemish primitives, but not in his account of Rubens and Rembrandt, as if the milieu—a vague concept in his mind, it must be admitted—were irrelevant to the study of artists of supreme genius. And yet it is a sign of his breadth that Fromentin, whose persistent critical concentration on the aesthetic offered what many had thought was lacking in Taine, should even concern himself with the milieu. He does not fear at all the charge that he might be reducing unique or ineffable facts of individual creativeness to social generalities, foreign to the nature of art. He regrets rather his insufficient knowledge of history, which is already considerable for a layman—as a student he had frequented Michelet—and which guides him in his interpretations. If in that quoted letter he limits the significance of the milieu to the understanding of the men, he goes beyond this in the book. Here the social basis of Dutch art, formulated with remarkable acumen by Hegel many years before and then elaborated by Taine in a less searching way, is presented as something not only fully evident, but also as necessary for the production and intimate character of the art. Read the curious, whimsical statement in the chapter on the "origin and character of the Dutch School," where Fromentin remarks that Dutch art was so closely tied to the state of Dutch affairs that it issued promptly from the newly won Dutch independence as if "the right to have a national school of painting" were one of the stipulations of the treaty of 1609. Dutch painting has been a classic example for the thesis of the social and environmental dependence of a style of art; in the Holland of the seventeenth century the relations between geography, economy, social life, religion and art are exceptionally clear. Yet this insight has not been carried much further since Hegel's time, and the concept of "milieu" has blurred the perception of the society itself. Fromentin's imagination is stirred by this transparent example of a historic unity of art and nature and social life, which he does not undertake, however, to explore. What interests us most in his vision of this Dutch complex

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is his view of the common qualities of the Dutch *school* as a true social accomplishment, an education of the individuals determining a high level of performance in the ordinary practitioners. To understand this view, one must contrast it with the current idea that the characteristics of a school are a mere taste or convention, without artistic value in themselves, serving only as a substratum for the achievements of the great masters. Bourgeois life at its best—and Holland was an example—had for Fromentin certain positive moral values: probity, patience, devotion to a task, reasonableness and regard for reality, which determine the character of lesser artists and give to their painting a seriousness and honesty that we must respect. In aristocratic Belgium, there are no interesting minor personalities around Rubens, only imitators or assistants; in Holland, Fromentin discovers a host of attractive individual minor painters, many of them artists who have also another profession or trade.

I have said that Fromentin wished to retain in the book something of his experience as a traveler and that the chapters follow roughly his route in the Low Countries. But just as an Impressionist picture, attached to a site and a moment, has a composition within its seeming randomness, so in this apparently unplanned, unsystematic work with its varied impressions, encounters and free range of ideas, there is a structure, a large antithesis that underlies even the evaluations, shaping the latter into a drama of judgment. It is not a beautiful or great structure, but it is a form and that is important. On one side is the Flemish Catholic Rubens, the master closest to Fromentin's ideal—the exterior man, the synthesizer of the Italian and the Northern, the unproblematic genius who produces with an easy power like a force of nature; the more he is seen, the more he grows in mastery and grandeur; in his portraits alone he fails, but this task requires a sense for the inner world of personalities which is naturally denied him, being incompatible with his highest qualities. On the other side is the genius of Holland, the Protestant Rembrandt, an artist *hors concours,* rising above all the other Dutch painters whom Fromentin admires. His greatness emerges most clearly in portraiture, for Fromentin the most spiritual art of all. Yet Fromentin cannot take Rembrandt. Before some of his works—and these include the most famous, like *Dr. Tulp's Anatomy Lesson* and *The Night Watch*—he is repelled or uncertain. More than half his account of

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the artist is given to paintings that he rejects. Rembrandt, according to Fromentin, is a dual personality with conflicting aims that introduce fatal errors into his work. He is typical of the interior, more modern man and his example poisons art. Rubens, too, was born with polar possibilities; even his teachers, Van Noort and Van Veen, represent opposite tendencies in the human being as well as in all culture, the first more spontaneous and hearty, a representative of the indigenous Flemish character; the other cultivated, academic and self-conscious. Rubens was able, however, to fuse the two successfully, giving to the native exuberance of one the harmony which in the other was thin and uninspired, without sap. But Rembrandt, who was no less gifted than the Flemish artist, retained side by side in his work the antagonistic components of his nature; he wished to be both realist and idealist, the painter of the visible and the invisible. Where these appear separately, the results are the greatest masterpieces. Where he brings them together in a single work, as in *The Night Watch,* the painting is a failure. In only a few paintings, like *The Syndics,* are these opposites successfully combined.

Whatever we may think of this judgment of Rembrandt, the most debated and disturbing in the book, it is also an element of art in Fromentin's writing. It is as if Fromentin, having avowed his cult of Rubens in the first part, found it necessary to introduce and to play up as the major *motif* in the second part an opposite pattern of artistic personality, which in turn strengthens by contrast the intensity of his image of Rubens. Duality against unity, subjective against objective, the hidden against the open, the style of mystery and vague emergence in light and shadow against the style of climactic drama in clear daylight. And in complementary reversal of these contrasts, the lesser Dutch masters—individual and charming figures—are opposed to Rubens' minor Flemish contemporaries and followers, who are dull satellites rather than small independent planets. Again, in the last section, turning to the Flemish primitives of the fifteenth century, Fromentin isolates Van Eyck and Memling as antithetic personalities, embodiments respectively of the material and the spiritual, and reduces the rest of early Flemish painting to an incidental accompaniment of these two masters.

One should not suppose therefore that all the analyses and judgments made within this antithetic framework are necessarily

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artificial and calculated for literary effect. The confrontation of unlike things, the search for contrasts, often bring out hidden characteristics which might otherwise escape us. Conflict is so basic in the growth of personality that the search for a dualism in the artist may be extremely fruitful for interpretation; much of recent criticism proceeds from this insight and the modernity of Fromentin's book lies partly in its dialectical approach. But the final image he gives us of Rembrandt is certainly distorted. We cannot accept his idea that Rembrandt preserved throughout his life two opposed styles; this is hard to reconcile with his known development as an artist. As happens often, a personal pattern of interpretation betrays its element of arbitrariness when it leads to a false conclusion. There is an instructive example also in Fromentin's account of Rubens. In 1875 almost nothing had been established concerning the painting of Van Noort, Rubens' first teacher, although romantic tradition pictured him as a vigorous, exuberant nature, the proper master of Rubens and Jordaens. Fromentin was impelled to reconstruct his features according to the requirements of his general theory, and to furnish him with hypothetical traits from which could be deduced in turn the Flemish qualities of his receptive pupil. But we know today that Van Noort was completely unlike the image in Fromentin, who based himself on a single work now recognized as by Jordaens. Far from being the opposite of the academic Van Veen, Van Noort was a weaker follower of the same Romanizing tendency and could scarcely have offered the young Rubens an example of natural robustness and freedom in art.

Fromentin's Van Noort is a novelistic invention and reminds us that his novel, *Dominique,* is also built on antithetic pairings of characters. But the importance he gives to the dualism of personality, whether resolved as in Rubens, or maintained as a permanent struggle, as in Rembrandt, is more than a literary device; we suspect that it arises from a conflict within Fromentin, a consciousness of his own polarity. He was painfully aware that the shortcomings of his art were rooted in his character, and came to understand more deeply than others what the personality of an artist meant for his work. In his time it was often said that as painter and writer he had a double nature, and that he alone was equally capable as both. Today, we value the writer more than the painter and we ask ourselves

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whether his oscillation between literature and art was not perhaps the result of self-doubt, an attempt to evade the most difficult challenge of his nature which demanded a single solution that he could not accept. From early youth he was tormented by the necessity of compromise and a feeling of spiritual weakness. In struggling against his conservative parents who respected art—his father was a physician and amateur painter—but preferred for their brilliant son the career of a lawyer, Fromentin never cut loose; he remained prudently attached because of his economic dependence. A passionate admirer of Delacroix, he was already as a young man a chastened romantic who recommended caution and measure to himself. At twenty-four he wrote that the secret of life is to know one's own limits. For his painting he sailed to North Africa as a remote world where he might be freer than in France. In time he became enslaved to this exotic African subject-matter which he continued to reproduce from memory, long after it had ceased to inspire him. When excited by the landscape of Provence in which he discovered a new possibility for his art, he reasoned that it would be imprudent to change his themes and his style when they were so well established in the public's mind. He wrote then to his father that he would paint in two manners: one for the public, the other for himself. The outcome, as might be expected, was that he painted only for the Salon.

The character of the man is visible in the self-constraint of his delicate pictures; he is one of those who live below their means out of anxiety and unwillingness to take risks. He justified this attitude by underestimating his abilities, as if these were finally and fatally limited, instead of striving to surmount his admitted weaknesses. The same underestimation appears in the hero of his novel who is an image of the author: Dominique speaks of himself as a mediocrity, a failure, although his story and entire spirit mark him as a superior man. He is a defeated personality whose suffering arises from a hopeless romantic passion. To dominate himself after this unhappy love (which represents the great crisis of Fromentin's youth), he gives up poetry and intellectual ambition and retires to the province as a simple farmer in daily contact with the realities of nature and physical work. It is the common sense alternative to the romantic solutions: religion or travel—Fromentin's teacher, Cabat, after a crisis lived for a while in a Dominican monastery. Sainte-Beuve said of Dom-

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inique that he was not fully a poet nor fully a lover; as a lover, "he mistakes his fear for virtue and his natural timidity for a stoic effort."* Even as a young man, more ardent and hopeful, Dominique is a timid dual being: his poems are published anonymously, but under his own name he writes a political treatise that gives him considerable prestige. Fromentin is haunted by his own duality and projects it constantly into his writing.

His attitude to Rembrandt may be seen then as a justification of himself. Scrupulous as he was in looking at the painting of the past, Fromentin could not escape his desires and least of all, his hidden regrets. They turn up often in this book which seems at first reading a triumph of disciplined observation and judgment. Even the account of Rubens is shaped by the inner needs of the deeply troubled artist. When he defines the Flemish master in a memorable phrase as a temperament *"sans orages et sans chimères"*—without storms and without vain dreams—he states the antithesis to his own youthful self which he had described fifteen years before in the person of Dominique as *"un coeur orageux . . . . et certainement martyrisé de chimères"*—a stormy heart and a martyr to chimerical dreams. Rembrandt too is acceptable to him only when he is free from those *"chimères"*; the same word comes insistently to Fromentin's mind before the great portrait of the Burgomaster Six: *"personnage peu chimérique, une peinture sans chimère"*—a rather unfanciful personality, a painting without fancy. But Delacroix who adored Rubens no less than did Fromentin and placed Rembrandt above Raphael, on the contrary welcomed these chimerical fancies as the true source of art: "In taking his brushes in hand," he said "the artist abandons the easy and trivial course of everyday life to enter the world of noble fantasy (*chimères*), necessary for the creative fire."

We shall not conclude that the critic remains imprisoned in himself and that his opinions are only a personal avowal; Fromentin's book contains too much that we can verify with our eyes to justify this shallow judgment. His formulation about Rubens' equable nature is indeed right, but it owes its warmth to the writer's desire; he saw more clearly than others this side of Rubens which he himself had

* It is curious that many years before, Fromentin had noted in a draft of an unpublished essay on Sainte-Beuve that the great critic was a double nature, weak and contrite, a man of memories, regrets and tempered impressions.

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lacked as a youth and which had become for him a personal end. It was reassuring to discover that this man of overflowing vitality was also sensible and restrained. But in Fromentin's image of Rubens we miss an important, familiar part of the painter. His critic admires Rubens' masculine force, yet shies away from just that aspect of his art in which it is most heartily displayed, the sensuality of his pagan pictures with their great nudes. In mentioning the portrait of Rubens' wife, he apologizes for the painter's indiscretion in representing her partly naked.

With Rembrandt the relationship is more complicated and disturbing. We may put it rudely by saying that Fromentin in doubting Rembrandt was defending himself, as in elevating Rubens to the heights he was pointing to his own absolute goal. Rubens was an infinitely more vigorous, masculine Fromentin, the kind of artist Fromentin would have liked to be, a Delacroix without nerves and more robust, equally at home in the religious and secular spheres, "who could gaily paint a torso in an afternoon and, pleased with himself, put down his palette and go off for a ride on his horse, without a thought about painting on his mind." But Rembrandt was the dream of his unhappy conscience, his earliest self, the bohemian and romantic chimera of Fromentin's youth, a stubborn, sincere, fanatical, uncompromising poet-painter, at odds with authority, whom the modern artist dared not follow and very early sacrificed to his need of success. The sad Dutchman grapples with the oldest secret wishes of Fromentin, and in doing so denies the rightness of Fromentin's public ideals.

It is mainly in criticizing Rembrandt that Fromentin commits himself to laws and absolute stringencies in art. In Rubens he discovers an admirable *"mesure,"* but the Flemish master is no occasion for expounding rules. His art is a triumph of sheer genius, which by some miracle is in perfect harmony with good sense. Rembrandt is another story. With him Fromentin has to be unrelentingly censorious. The failures he reproaches in Rembrandt are due to no lack of genius or to unfavorable circumstance, but to the artist's willfulness, his disregard of plain logic as well as of the rules of art. Rembrandt attempts the impossible, he wishes to transcend the principle of identity and of contradiction, and when he loses his head, his color becomes murky, the execution spoils, everything goes wrong.

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What are these rules that Rembrandt fatally disobeys? It is interesting for Fromentin's conscience that they not only command conformity as rules, but are themselves rules of conformity. If you paint reality, stick to reality; if you paint the visionary, stick to the visionary. Do not mix the two in the same work. But above all, conform to your theme. If it is a portrait, be faithful to the sitter; if it is a secular world, let it be recognizable as such in the costumes, the gestures, the proportions and the setting. *The Night Watch* is not religious or heroic; why then the disorder and fantastic gloom in a sober bourgeois assembly? With its shadows and lights, the picture is a mystification, not a transfiguration of reality.

All this sounds very sensible; we have heard it often in explanations of other failures of great artists. There is always in such works a major incompatibility between two aspects.

What makes us doubt Fromentin's reasoning in this case is that we have found in other great works a similar striving to unify the seemingly incompatible, to make the supernatural natural, and the natural unreal, to unite movement and stability, the surface pattern and depth. Indeed Fromentin discerns such oppositions in Rubens without asserting a problem. He hesitates, it is true, before the *Martyrdom of Saint Livinus,* with its paradoxical contrast of the violent and the saintly; but here he doesn't see that for the Baroque artist suffering, glory and ecstasy merge into one.

As for the rules of color disregarded by Rembrandt, we recognize that they are the requirements of a particular style or tradition of which Fromentin is the anxious guardian against the heretics in his own day. His demand that the local color persist in light and in deepest shadow would be meaningless in an art unconcerned with a natural illumination; and even where sunlight is primary, as in Impressionism, there are great works that violate this rule and build upon the violation a novel beauty, not to mention a more precise suggestion of reality. It is surprising that in spite of his knowledge of history and of the marvellous variety of styles practiced with great art in different times and places, and in spite of his conviction that the man is the source of expression, inventing his appropriate means and fashioning his own kind of unity, Fromentin should wish to impose the conventions of his school as the prerequisite of all good art. This is the most common and inexpugnable error of criticism;

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and it turns up among those who have denounced it most firmly.

However, there is more to be said on this point about nature as a norm. For the modern artist, it is a monstrous philistine error. Yet in demanding conformity to nature, Fromentin was not an obtuse academician. It is too easy today to feel superior to the naturalistic requirements of the old schools as wholly external to art. But I am sure that the great artists of the nineteenth century who believed that painting was in principle a harmony of colors and forms and who despised the vulgar delight in exact resemblance, would not have recognized their principle in twentieth century art and would have been shocked by the modern distortions and indifference to nature. Not very long ago, Cézanne admired the painting of Monet, but found Gauguin's insufferably stylized and flat. The power of representation was regarded by Delacroix too as a high and necessary gift of art. In an essay on Gros he dwells especially on the latter's realism as an admirable trait; his evocation of the battlefield is for Delacroix a great original accomplishment. If he finds fault with some of Gros' best pictures, it is because of incongruities of perspective in the different planes. Given the representation of figures in perspective space, artistic harmony demanded an accord of the represented world no less binding on the painter than the accord of lines or of neighboring tones on the surface of the canvas. Perspective, light and shade and the natural articulation of bodies were more deeply involved in the aesthetic norms of their painting than the artists themselves were aware. The so-called "values"—a scale of relative brightness of tones—were studied both as a means of illusion and as the source of a special beauty of coloring. In Fromentin, as in other writers, we miss some clarity about the relation between these two aspects, the difference between the values as rules governing the correct representation of atmosphere and light by the choice of tones that take their proper place in the three dimensional depth, and the values as artistic, quasi-musical elements forming a system of tones harmonized through a scale or order of luminosities; the latter may occur in a style which does not undertake to represent atmosphere or a natural illumination. We sense vaguely in the requirement of truth to nature —and this requirement was formulated none too carefully or logically—an underlying principle of harmony and a search for order as in abstract art which, in making coherent structure alone the

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criterion of perfection, also imposes a system of restricted elements with a common character of forms. Nature was already an order with a secret law and rich correspondences in which the painter of genius could make original discoveries. A general conformity to nature was therefore taken for granted in the nineteenth century by the most convinced devotees of pure art, although they might differ about what aspects of nature were primary and what means the most beautiful. The fluidity of the concept of the natural and the fluctuations within the secular content of Western art—on which this basic naturalism was founded—admitted an enormous range of styles. One distinguished a noble correctness from a pedantic accuracy, and the best artists of the last century recognized the charm and expressiveness of naiveté in drawing, not as a denial of nature, but as a personal naturalness and spontaneity within the accepted framework of external natural relationships. Fromentin could regard the visible reality as the living source of the pictorial in Dutch art and the close study of nature as the primary discipline of the artist, and yet reject the new realistic landscape painting of his day as an unfortunate deviation. At one point, he hopes paradoxically that the example of Dutch art will bring the moderns back from nature to pure painting; but then he also says that the ideal, the corrective, is to create a modern Metsu, without showing that one has him in mind.

What disturbed Fromentin in Rembrandt was not only the incorrectness of drawing and color, but a more far-reaching arbitrariness, an unwillingness to be reasonable and consistent. This fantastic Dutchman introduced bizarre elements into a painting of real life. He accepted the theme or convention of reality and then refused to abide by its conditions. Rembrandt, we have seen, is for him an anarchic master who undertakes the impossible, confounding the world of dreams and the world of reality. Fromentin feels in Rembrandt something profoundly unsocial that alarms him like the proposals of subversive revolutionary minds. Indeed the term *"chimère"* that he applies to Rembrandt was a common disparagement of socialist and utopian ideas in Fromentin's time; it had a repugnant sense for him in particular, because as a youth he had been attracted to the left just before the revolution of 1848*. He opposed to it the concept of

* Fromentin's contemporary and admirer, Jacob Burckhardt, who quoted with approval Fromentin's phrase about Rubens—*"sans orages et sans chimères,"* criticized Rembrandt rather harshly as a painter of the *"canaille."* But unlike the Frenchman, he found Rembrandt lacking in spirituality.

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"mesure" as a social and not only artistic virtue, and came to regard this restraint as a positive, almost creative quality. Few words appear so often in Fromentin's criticism and his novel as *"chimère"* and *"mesure."* "Nothing chimerical . . . . a perfect equilibrium," he writes in *Dominique,* and in the same book, "a rare good sense, a perfect rectitude . . . . produces miracles." These are characterizations of Dominique's teacher, Augustin, who is like a little Dutchman in quality—sober, disciplined, honest, persevering, without great talent but effective through these domestic virtues; "the reasonable," he says, "is the inseparable friend of justice and truth."

In this artistic morality of reason and measure Fromentin is conscious of his ties with French tradition; in admiring Ruisdael and the lesser Dutch artists of the seventeenth century, he thinks of their affinity with French literature and thought of the same time: they are the *"honnêtes hommes"* of painting. Rembrandt, on the other hand, in his career, his personality and art, is the most un-French figure in the book. He is without *"mesure,"* an imprudent man who risks everything after having established himself as an artist.

The more Fromentin criticizes Rembrandt, the more we are drawn to the Dutch painter and the more we feel sorry for Fromentin. What a turmoil in the Frenchman's heart as he pursues the old man so relentlessly in the name of reason, nature, law and the inherent necessities of art! With all his admiration for Rembrandt's portraits, he cannot wholeheartedly accept this crazy Hollander who dared to transfigure the real world. Grant his success and you have to grant also that Fromentin's art was possibly on a wrong path. Rembrandt's great inner liberty challenged and disturbed him as did nothing else. Fromentin wrote to his wife: "Rembrandt doesn't let me sleep."

Fromentin, like others of his generation—he was born in 1820, within a year of Flaubert and Baudelaire, a year after Courbet—was a belated child of romanticism who could no longer be content with an imagined world and yet could not accept the familiar reality as a matter for art. In his early twenties already, the young painter, who had been nourished by the romantic poets, wrote that long observation of things is better than imagination; the latter is a principle of weakness and misfortune and spoils the freshness of vision. But he admitted that he lacked true imagination, for which he substituted

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a tenacious memory of past impressions, and he believed, too, that fantasy and imagination are better than memory. His painting was a compromise between the desire for an exotic image and the requirement of a directly experienced world as the theme of an objective art. In North Africa where he found the subjects of most of his works, he could dwell for a while in a more primitive nature, rich in poetic occasions and inhabited by a passionate people more vehement and robust than himself; it was at once remote and yet available to a traveller's eye. But Fromentin's habit of detached observation as a source of nuances and finesse meant already a weakening of the ardor that makes Delacroix's African scenes unmistakably romantic. The tonality of revery replaced the tones of passion. In Africa one of Fromentin's proud discoveries was that the color of this semi-tropical region was essentially gray.

He discovered also that it was a classic world in its precise, stable landscape forms and the nobility of the desert peoples, who were more like the Homeric than the Biblical heroes. But his search for a calm expression was qualified by an equal love of the sensitive picturesque touch and the atmospheric tone. His work is involved therefore in a common dilemma of refined, undecided artists of his age, the alternatives of color and line; he dreams of their synthesis, like the mad Frenhofer in Balzac's *Unknown Masterpiece*. Fromentin avows this aim in his novel when he describes a portrait of the heroine exhibited in the Salon: it is both sharp and vague, outlined yet nuanced in color. This is not an impossible ideal; it was shared by Whistler and Fantin-Latour; Cézanne and Seurat in different ways succeeded in fusing the apparent opposites. But Fromentin was unable to transform as was necessary the two opposed elements of his problem; he wished to unite them while maintaining the established character of each. As a painter he belongs to a familiar type of highly cultured academic artist of the nineteenth century, too sensitive to yield to the vulgarities of official or public taste, too talented to be merely the preserver of a tradition, but also too reticent or weak in conviction to follow his impulses to the end, and therefore creating an art which has its undeniable individuality, but lacks that decided natural flow of the spirit and the hand which we recognize in works of greater power. Two friends of Fromentin, Puvis de Chavannes and Gustave Moreau, also belong to this class of noble academicians.

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I have implied that Fromentin's judgment of Rembrandt was affected by his own relation to contemporary art. This is not a discovery for which we must go beneath the surface of the book. Fromentin himself believed that it was impossible to criticize past art without commenting implicitly on the art of one's time. And he took this principle seriously enough to make his views on contemporary painting as explicit as he could. While engaged on the book, he wrote to a friend that his text still lacked "the lessons that should be drawn from it, the applications to the present. . . . And that is the indispensable moral without which my work will have neither value, nor relevance nor novelty." The commitment is surely excessive and would hardly have been risked in print. The book lives in spite of its pages on modern art.

These were written at a moment when academic art was in hopeless decline and the Impressionists were exhibiting as a vigorous, insurgent group in whose works the younger artists, writers and amateurs sensed an absolute modernity keyed to the new tempo of life and liberty of ideas. In the defense of Impressionism (as of Realism in the generation before) the example of the Dutch painters had been a powerful argument. The art of the 1860's and '70s renewed a tradition of bourgeois painting that had been interrupted by the authoritative grand style of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The painter Boudin wrote that the people and landscape of his own century were no less worthy subjects of painting than had been the Hollanders and Holland of the seventeenth. The actuality of color and brushstroke, light and atmosphere, outdoor painting and direct vision in the most recent art made the old works seem almost contemporary. It would have been impossible at this time to write about the Flemish and Dutch masters without hinting at the modern school.

Fromentin, whose art was exotic in theme and classicizing in mood, could only be embarrassed by this new trend. Where he refers to living painters, it is mainly to polemize against Manet and the emerging Impressionist art or to lament the general decay. The line from Courbet to Monet was to him a sad corruption of the art he had loved in his youth. Manet disturbed him most, and in his letters he remarks with some ill-humor that all of Manet is already in Hals, but that the Frenchman has copied the weaknesses of Hals, the

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results of his senility. For us today those two late works of Hals—the Regents of the Home for the Aged—are among his best and approach Rembrandt in their austere pathos and revelation of old age. Fromentin has judged them inferior because of his narrow standard of good *facture*. Besides, their relation to Manet is less obvious than he supposed; if they recall the modern painter in their bareness of tones and contrasts, the psychological insight of these exceptional, most mature works of Hals' old age is in spirit foreign to Manet.

We recognize also in Fromentin's criticism of Rembrandt's thick crusty painting and intensified light a connection with his judgment of contemporary art; these are qualities attractive to the independent young artists in 1875. (We may ask, too, whether his neglect of Rubens' sketches—he ignores the marvellous one of *The Martyrdom of St. Ursula* which he undoubtedly saw in the Brussels Museum—is not related to his dislike of the sketchiness of the new art of his day.) In attacking the unnamed Impressionists for giving an undeserved importance to sunlight and the open air, he seems to approach the criticism of this art made a generation later by a more advanced modern school; for one thing, he urges a return from this sketchy naturalism to pure painting, by which he means a more studied and constructed picture. But Fromentin's attack is too indiscriminate to convince us that he has looked at this contemporary art with the same care as at the old Dutch painting to which it corresponds. He is unable to see what is genuinely artistic in the originality of the Impressionists; that genteel discretion which forbids him to name living artists, also permits him to condemn entire schools *en masse* for violating his arbitrary rules of form. He excepts from his general condemnation a few artists: the old Corot, who had died in 1875, and two unnamed figures, Diaz and perhaps Jacque. Corot he admires chiefly in his weaker vaporous style and makes into an academic model by speaking of "the rules of value-painting" established and demonstrated by Corot in his works. On the other hand, in a criticism of the Salon of 1876, published under a journalist's name, Fromentin commended Puvis de Chavannes and Gustave Moreau as the true masters of his own generation and called Vollon "one of the rare good painters of our times." We are surprised that an artist who understood so finely Rubens and Ruisdael could prefer those academicians to their great contemporaries. That is the fatality of taste

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which owes both its strength and weakness to the complex stresses of personal needs. We learn from these pages of Fromentin how difficult is insight into a new contemporary art, especially if it belongs to a generation younger than one's own.

It is a commonplace of criticism that the key to past art is contemporary art and that only those who respond to the new can judge the older works well. This is the reverse of the classic teaching that only the frequentation of the old masters enables one to judge the new. One can think of excellent minds, Burckhardt and Winckelmann, who wrote understandingly of past art, while neglecting or misjudging the works of their own age. Great critics of contemporary art are no less rare. Baudelaire is the outstanding example of a critic inspired by a passionate admiration for living artists; but his chief love, Delacroix, was twenty-two years older than himself (like Picasso for a writer born after 1900), and his longest critical study is of Guys, his senior by sixteen years. For the greatest painter of his own generation, Courbet, he had only grudging praise; and if he recommended a younger artist, Edouard Manet, it was for the modernity of his themes and for qualities of imagination that this pioneer of Impressionism hardly possessed—one should look at Manet's lithographs for Poe's *Raven* to see how far of the mark was Baudelaire's conception of Manet. To perceive the aims of the art of one's own time and to judge them rightly is so unusual as to constitute an act of genius. Baudelaire was able to rise above his theories and admire what was in 1859 an ultra-realistic art—the landscape sketches of the young Boudin, recording a precise moment of the day and the weather, poetically, it is true, but with an aim conflicting with the critic's principles. His reservations before those pastels of Boudin, which he thought had yet to be elaborated *imaginatively* into pictures, anticipated Fromentin's view of Impressionism as an art which confused the sketch and the finished work. The two great critics, who had both begun with a review of the Salon of 1845 and a love of Delacroix, came eventually to a similar judgment of the Salon art of the 1860's as decadent, ruined by cleverness, illusionism and themes of curiosity. In supporting Manet as an original modern spirit, above the vulgarity of his age, Baudelaire classed him, however, as "the first in the decrepitude of his art."

With all its prejudices and errors, Fromentin's book remains

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a masterpiece of criticism which may be read beside Baudelaire's. We certainly prefer it to anything written about art by the defenders of Impressionism or Realism. Had he been sympathetic to these, Fromentin would no doubt have written more understandingly of Rembrandt too. But if he had possessed so daring and modern a mind as a painter, he would perhaps not have written at all. Yet the best qualities of his criticism are not far from the advanced contemporary arts in spirit. He is intensely empirical, in spite of his traditional norms. He knows how to see and explores the fabric and color of the old paintings with a sureness that has to do with the general movement of the new art toward a direct vision of things and a lyricism of color and light. His power of discerning the personality in the touch and the tone, as well as in the conception of the whole, corresponds to the self-consciousness of the modern artist as a responsive individual who represents only objects of immediate experience, who attends to his sensations and strives to make his pigment and brushstrokes and the surface of the pictures the evident carriers of his art. The progressive elements of Fromentin's criticism are inconsistent with the rules and standards that he applies to Rembrandt and his own time. I have suggested that these contradictions arise from conflicts within Fromentin; but it should also be said that he surpassed himself in the strength of his book. It is not the work of revery and poetic paraphrase of art, that we might expect from the author of *Dominique,* but grows out of a constant contact with human things, a tense effort of perception and judgment. The forceful qualities that he cannot realize in his studied painting of nature or in his sad autobiographical novel, surge up abundantly when he has to speak about art. In his encounter with the works of the past, he shows an energy of feeling denied him in daily life and in his own painting. The "unreal" world of past art is for him the fullest and richest reality, and the task of judging it, a personal liberation.

Fromentin wrote *The Old Masters of Belgium and Holland* as a relief from the intractable problems of painting. He was fifty-five years old, respected, covered with the official honors of the Salon, but very tired and uncertain of his art. He felt himself to be a failure as an artist, condemned in perpetuity, he said, to repeat his doubtful successes, the exotic little landscapes with horsemen, remembered from the African travels of his youth. In this mood, he undertook

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the trip to Belgium and Holland, not knowing whether a book would come out of it, although urged to write by his friends who had enjoyed the brilliance of his casual talk on the painters of the past and knew his gifts as a writer. He was certain only that the journey would not contribute to his art, for he felt rightly that his troubles as a painter were lodged too deep within his personality to be resolved by new inspirations from the past. But this concentrated, solitary experience in a foreign land was a powerful reawakening; it stirred his energies as nothing had done before. The accumulated forces of a lifetime were suddenly sparked, and in a few months, with an incredible speed, he wrote out this book which represents his gifts better than his paintings, refined as these may be. It reached a greater public and provoked controversies that have not yet come to an end. It won the admiration of Flaubert who saluted Fromentin as a literary master. On the strength of the book, he posed his candidacy for the French Academy as a man of letters; he was defeated by a minor art critic who had the bad grace to attack his dead rival a few months later. Fromentin's writings had brought him no prizes like his pictures, but his name is more secure through his books.

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William Burford

CURE

Stroll toward the beach; stroll till distant surf heard yearning,
Sand seen shining, entice your landsman's legs to quicken pace,
Haste to reach and revel in the sea. You will feel the sunlight,
Wide winning whip, write Speed in thick indelible of a winter blood
Shed then by shoulder blades the ebb tide hones to spur your arms
To wings to go with it like Pegasus flown to a sea mystery. Water
—You are one of those would walk on water—shrinks before your toes.

This morn you rose with sunrise, while still near shore the silver
Stomached trout, breakfasting on minnow morsels, twist through
billows,
Flip from crest to frothing crest, and skin of the early swimmer
Thrill with quick slides. When a child you felt a fishbone stick
In your throat which your father nicknamed 'windpipe.' It gasped
Past that snagged fish's rib a rasp that could not shake it loose.
It blew the bone to bow vibrations beautiful as waves must raise
Fingering the whale's flank. Pain can be arranged to loose a beauty.

Remembrance, like a piscene fossil quick in waves of shale, quickens
In a shiver of the brain, of a strata chilled so in the morning sea
You see, counting the gills' leaping pulse, the clean surgeon smile
Devilishly as his brilliant forceps did. His smile was once upon a time
An angel's, one of the sublime Time fouls by tumbling oceans on
cumbersome
Oceans of moments upon, that an instant shift shows rusted to a grin,
And a song that soothed soured to the cackle of a mad man's rhapsody.
The early swimmer would be back to beauty. Back! the bell salt
gnawed

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To rack and leprous ruin, so close its lone gull rolls an eagle, cannot
Rouse the ring to reach its buoy's duty out: Reef! I bellow reef!

In, to the heart in, the sun did into you so sear its S you crawled
From under any lifeguard's vigil. Now the day is near to noon; but
When a man's foot cannot land and leave his eye a Hindu's climbing
Air on holy incline to the sun, how then are arms, unthickened
By the distance of their shallow style, scalpels 'twixt your island
Body and the shore's hoarded more; how then the fins that feed on
Man!
And whittling cords that somewhere out of sight had leashed the
clouds
Loose them moving on the sun; mar the bright day dark; the sea's
face
Shadow like one birthmarked badly black. That lone gull frightened
Flees, to leave in ocean blemished to an undertow of cold madness
You alone. Oh the bell! it cannot toll even an inauspicious passing.
Your only chance: that sound the sun initialed in your soul make deed.
Catch a wave accumulating greatness where you are, far out, for fall
At end of long build landward. But Time runs out like an open wound.
Catch one great wave right and Miracle! you're bird till beach
Where by the glide ground down out of sky scratched you lie and glad
For being—oh you who hymn, when by the wave as His was it is
winged,
Lift up the body!—nowhere slashed by the coast's tricked guardians.
You are home now, home; and your fondest sense freshening to truth
You see the angler's line that seemed when you sped down to the sea,
The low sun at an angle fevering the eye to dream a scene of sport;
Seemed lashing to hook from heaven one of the gull herd that circles
Always over possibilities of fish; you see that line in water end.
Still you can dream, knowing water deep more lovingly from land, this
Sand that slips through the tightening hand a crumbled fish of shale.

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William Burford

"SIR, YOU AND I HAVE LOVED—"*

Cue for the loveless, who desecrates:

Mirage, believed blue mirror shimmering salvation
To the traveler infinitely more miles parched than
His tongue-hanging, double humped camel, called dromedary,
Who reminds—thirst whirls the mind in industrious circles—
Of a brand of dates. Where dates are is water: logic, followed by
Laughter that in a desert one is very hard up for . . . . clots like slow
vomit
In the lungs. Astray in a Sahara one hears oneself going gradually
Madder than Charles Lamb's hatter: while rubbing my eyes to
Brighten the blurred promise, See! I gesture away my pith
Protection from the sun, and the sun is a strict punisher
Of inferior fashion. Mirage, believed blue mirror shimmering a song:

The hatter's such an elusive rabbit
Rommel dispatched his desert rats
CHAsing, RAcing the maze of the ways of the waste

Mirage, believed blue mirror shimmering the end of respiration.

Cue for the lover, who lauds:

No great thrust as of that ram-head Roman
Shoulder drove. I need no overwhelming, none
But the hush of the touch of your fingertip
Spinning down, then up, until around me Love,

* From Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra.*

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Ultimately spun to sleep's cocoon, clings fine,
Like peach surrounding stone; and the dream,
The eater by night, stuffs itself on the sweet
Yellow of your love-bred fruit whose bare seed
Dawn begins to dry for next night's burial by you,
Oh Tender of a branch that hangs such succulence!

Cue for the loved one, in whom all ends:

I, as do midst dunes frowning disapproval
Dwellers of the green deep down oasis
Live, do live to live intensely rooted
Through to the liquor such praise is:
Rare rain refined by the long descent to rock,
Through sands that scrub it clean as it fell
From the cloud of a swept desert sky,
From the white of an eye moted to cry
By the sea-wind the jagged mountains comb
Of dying strands, comb wild as dervish hair
That cuts where it swings the dust danced up
By such king's feet as mine.

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Stephen Spender

THE LIFE OF LITERATURE*

In 1933, John Lehmann published an anthology called *New Signatures* which showed that a new and socially conscious group of poets was writing in English. The writers who immediately attracted attention were W. H. Auden, Cecil Day Lewis, Rex Warner, William Empson, Julian Bell and myself. Of these, Empson was complicated, abstruse, very unlike the others.

A year later, my first volume, *Poems,* was published. I was pleased and rather relieved that they were so well received. But nothing that anyone wrote about my poems could prove what I wanted to be proved: that they were good. Nor was it so easy to be sure that the critics who said they were bad were not right. For these critics always expressed themselves much more cleverly than the ones who liked my work. Nearly all writers have these secret feelings about criticism: as though in the depths of their work they were writing for someone whom they know they can never please. And there is a further complication. Secretly the poet is not only writing for someone who does not like his work, he is also writing for everyone, and is disconcerted at being told that he is difficult, unmusical, and so on. In a sense, he only wants to please.

A writer is on trial, and his works are his "case." Before he has published he thinks that his "case" will be decided with his books. Soon he realizes that the most he can hope for is that his "case" will go on being considered after he is dead.

We were a "new generation," but it took me sometime to appreciate the meaning of this phrase. There was a generation of writers ten or twenty years older than ourselves labeled "Blooms-

* This is the third part of a chapter from an autobiographical work in progress. The first and second parts appeared in the November and December issues.

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bury," a name which I did not begin to hear until the 1930's. These writers did not admit that they were a group any more than writers of my own generation thought of themselves as such. However, like us they had certain qualities in common in the conditions of their lives (particularly in their being a generation which had grown up during the war), their tastes and their interests.

Perhaps the outstanding quality which defined Bloomsbury as a group, is that they were consciously in revolt against the tradition of Victorian realism in fiction and of romantic diction in poetry which still lingered on after the war. E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey, Roger Fry, and Clive Bell shared with T. S. Eliot (who can scarcely be included within this group) an interest in re-examining the principles and aims of art, and support of art which was consciously built up on defined principles. Although the thought and the achievement of these writers differ greatly, they all made new starts from carefully considered premises, their attitude to tradition was critical and discriminating. They were not content, as many contemporaries had been, to accept tradition as literary good manners handed down to them by the Victorians. They selected amongst their ancestors and tried to interpret what they considered best in the past within the conditions of the present.

Also the Bloomsbury writers had in common an admiration for France, where they found the supreme achievements of the European tradition. For values, in questions of style, for intellectual attitudes, they turned always to French civilization. They simplified considerably the task of modernizing English literature by making French modernism in painting and poetry accessible to English artists and writers. It may be that some of them watered down the French penetration and passion to mere elegance and "good taste." Nevertheless, English culture owes an enormous debt to the opening up of English life to French influences by this generation, and by several other groups, especially the three Sitwells (who formed a kind of family movement on their own).

The best works of Bloomsbury—the novels of E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf, the critical writing and historical biography of Lytton Strachey, the art criticism of Roger Fry, the critical journalism of Raymond Mortimer—are the works of individuals who excel any grouping or movement which can be labeled, and yet they exist

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within a movement, a meeting of friends and colleagues. These friends were an influence which helped other writing: the novels of Evelyn Waugh and Aldous Huxley, the lyrical essays in several manners of Cyril Connolly.

This generation had ideas of living and art which were very different from ours, though it took me long to realize the difference. Making modest claims on their time, they yet felt they had the right —indeed the duty—to cultivate themselves on a moderate diet of the arts, learning, pleasure and travel. In order to produce a few masterpieces and a great quantity of amusing and intelligent discussion of ideas, they maintained a modest standard of middle-class gentility. They certainly were not great exploiters and they lived far more modestly and expected less from society than the bureaucratic favored Soviet writer receives today. At the same time, their standard of "400 pounds a year and a room of one's own" (Virginia Woolf's figure in a famous essay), decisively removed their work and their leisure from the struggle of the great mass of mankind. They were decidedly class conscious, conscious even of a social gulf which divided them from a writer who had risen from the miners—D. H. Lawrence. Socialist in sympathy, the atmosphere of Bloomsbury was one of mild social snobbishness. These friends liked aristocratic elegance, and Clive Bell—the rather embarrassing self-appointed definer of *Civilization*—wrote that civilization depended on slavery. They were tolerant in their attitude towards morals, scrupulous in personal relations with each other, lacking in religious passion.

Bloomsbury has been sneered at, but there was a great deal to be said in its favor. It revived the principles of a tradition of genteel living, put such a life on a modest and moderate basis where it was still possible for cultivated people, living in charming country or in pleasant parts of London, to write well, decorate their houses agreeably, and entertain friends who could converse as well as they did themselves. Despite their tendency to be cliquish and their sense of their own superiority, they were essentially kind, human, loyal and considerate. Rather too conscious perhaps of being the last Romans surrounded by tottering Empires, nevertheless they could reasonably claim to be really civilized.

To them, there was something barbarous about our generation. For in us it appeared that the thin wall carefully constructed since

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1918 which enclosed their moderated indifference to chaos, had broken down, and a new generation who talked about revolutions, who took sides, who were politically naked, who wrote clumsily, and very few of whom had been to Paris, had arisen.

In fact, it is true that although some of the writers of the 1930's (MacNeice, Day Lewis and Empson, for example) were fine scholars, we were less cultivated than our predecessors, just as they in their turn were less cultivated than Henry James. By "cultivated" here I do not mean erudite. I am using the word in the rather special way in which people do use it when they consider themselves to have culture. I mean having a kind of intelligence which tends to insist on past values and despise present ones. In this sense of the word, Henry James was more cultivated than Bloomsbury, and indeed he regarded the younger generation of writers in his time with horror, finding their insistence on certain aspects of living coarse. It may be that there has been a continual loss of past values at the expense of present ones during this century. One sees why: for to each new generation it will appear that the previous generation sacrifices too much awareness of contemporary life to the preservation of traditional values. To the older generation it will seem that the value of living consists of the values they have known from the past and to some extent created within the present. There is not much point in arguing here about what "life" is. More important to realize that in an age where social conditions are changing rapidly, there will always be a pressure on contemporary culture brought to bear from two sides. From one, by those who consider that culture belongs primarily to the past and must be saved from the disintegrating inflow of actuality. From the other, by those who think that culture must be perpetually extended, strengthened, operated on and transfused with new life or it will wither into the conventional and the academic. There is also a third attitude, a combination of both these, that of the revolutionary traditionalist, who wishes in his work to accomplish a revolution whereby the greatest sense of the traditional is interpreted within the greatest sense of the modern. It can be argued that James Joyce's *Ulysses* is at once the most traditional and the most modern of works.

The young writers of the 1930's read into the work of Eliot and Joyce the assumption that Western civilization was ended:

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"Schon ist halb Europa, schon ist zumindest der Halbe Osten Europas auf dem Wege zum Chaos, fährt betrunken in heiligem Wahn am Abgrund entlang und singt dazu, singt betrunken und hymnisch wie Dmitri Karamasoff sang." In their own minds they examined the evidence of the poetic experience of Joyce and Eliot on which this hypothesis rested: and concluded that perhaps the end of a tradition and a class was the subject of this writing. The liquidation of a social class is a magnificent subject for literature. But by implication, Henry James or Virginia Woolf, as much as Chekhov, challenge writers in their society to produce other works about the emergence of a new life and not the decay of an old one. If the novels of Henry James suggest sometimes an immense remnant sale of the fine sensibilities of an aristocracy going into liquidation, the novels of Virginia Woolf suggest people with even finer sensibilities, in still more reduced circumstances. After Bloomsbury, our generation had still fewer assets to liquidate and still less reason to be attracted to the way of life which was going into liquidation. We were looking for something new not so much in literature as in life itself.

Another great difference in generations was made by the first World War. Until 1930, European literature was overshadowed by the war and the revolutions and misery which followed it. The attitude of most writers was to regard this as an overwhelming catastrophe, an enormous disintegration outside their control. All they could do was ignore or accept it. Hence there were two prevalent attitudes: a cynical pessimism, such as one finds in the early novels of Aldous Huxley, and a profound tragic acceptance such as one finds in *The Waste Land* and in some of the statements of E. M. Forster.

In the 1920's there was a tragedy to ignore or accept, but there seemed nothing to fight for or against. The revolutions which took place in Europe had the appearance of volcanoes, eruptions of despair and barbarism in the minds and bodies of the masses pouring out like lava over the cities. Besides this, the prevailing mood of the intellectuals who had known or been opposed to the war was a political pacifism, a conviction that armed remedies can do no good.

In the 1930's the situation was dramatically altered. Civilization was no longer threatened with social revolutions—which, however one regarded them, seemed to support social opportunities—which

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gave the workers a chance to emerge as a social class inheriting the problems left by the capitalist wars. Instead of this, there were Mussolini and Hitler who might indeed be just another symptom of the "decline of the West" but whose oppressive methods crystallized an opposition which was practically the whole intellectual life of Europe and the whole tradition of European freedom.

Thus it appears that deep and inevitable divisions between generations are an inevitable result of the history in which we live. We can only try to overcome these divisions by understanding them. To some extent we may try to avoid becoming victims of circumstances by relating our own attitudes within our own situation to that of others. If we are not able to do this, we run the risk of our civilization becoming divided into so many irreconcilable cliques representing different attitudes that the objective picture of our cultural life will be scarcely distinguishable from that of the mad.

When I was in England after 1930, I used often to stay with Rosamond Lehmann whom I had met when I was an undergraduate at Oxford. She had a beautiful house called Ipsden on the Berkshire Downs, which had once belonged to Charles Reade, the novelist. It had a large garden, partly surrounded by trees, but where this screen was broken, one could see the whale-like gray green forms of the Downs. The house and garden although opening onto the Downs were just sheltered enough to enclose their own atmosphere of the lawn covered at morning with dew in front of the wall of the side of the house, shafted with the Georgian windows.

Rosamond was one of the most beautiful women of this generation. Tall, and holding herself with a sense of her presence, she had a warmth and vitality which avoided the coldness of the statuesque. She had almond shaped eyes, a firm mouth which contradicted the spontaneousness of her girlish complexion. Her manner was warm, impulsive, and yet like her mouth under her cheeks which blushed there was a cool self-control which contradicted this. She had a sympathetic rather queenly attitude to the many young men who admired her and kept them at a slight distance beautified by a vague sense of tragedy that they could not come nearer. She gave me a delightful sense of my own sadness always.

To stay at Ipsden was one of my greatest pleasures. With Rosamond and Wogan Phillips—to whom she was then married—we

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would sometimes visit her neighbors: one of these was Lytton Strachey. Strachey with his long russet brown beard and his high squeaky voice was certainly the most astonishing of the Bloomsbury group. He combined strikingly their gaiety with their intermittent chilliness. Sometimes he would play childish games such as the one we played one Christmas called "up Jenkins"; often he would discourse brilliantly and maliciously; at times there was something insidiously suggestive about his giggling manner; at times he would sit in his chair without saying a word to anyone. He was delicate and hypochondriachal. But despite his oddness, his invalidism, his facetiousness, there was a devotion for his friends which commanded their loyalty so much that his death was a greater blow than any other to those who knew him well.

Others with whom I stayed were Harold Nicolson and his wife Victoria Sackville West, who then had a beautiful house in Kent. Harold was a strange combination of contradictory qualities: a cautious, discreet, intelligent man obsessed nevertheless with a passionate desire to give himself away, commit some enormous indiscretion, some unexpected blunder. Despite his rubicund florid appearance, which reminded me of some naughty Regency uncle doomed to be warned off the grounds by a prim generation of Victorian nephews and nieces, there was something a little haunted about him as though he were pursued for ever by humiliations and indiscretions. A fundamental undecidedness of his nature made it difficult for me to have confidence in his good will which I was later to remember as his realest quality. I always felt that for him a moment more important than the particular present one, was waiting round the corner and that he was half looking for it with a faint but discernible focussing onto an absent object of his eyes. Yet now that I look back on these days when I was twenty one, I see that, through being put off by superficial qualities to which I was very sensitive and by which I felt perhaps slighted, I failed to accept opportunities of friendship which were offered to me. It now seems to me that my nervousness was a form of ingratitude. But one unspoken friendship I always felt confident in though little was ever said between us: this was with Vita Sackville West. Her passion for poetry and the country, her real humility, touched me profoundly and gave me a confidence which I often think of.

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I met many people at this time, most of them living charming lives in charming houses, like the delightful house of Raymond Mortimer on the Thames. Nothing is more difficult to convey than the sense of a gulf which I have when I write of this life. Perhaps lack of confidence, self consciousness, naiveté, prevented my entering this world where I felt like a ploughman. Certainly I can think of faults, faults of style, faults of taste, stupidities in myself to set against their talents, their smoothness, their sense of style, their devotion. Yet somehow I feel that if there had been more warmth, a fire would have leapt across the gulf which divided our generations. Possibly their deepest feelings were reserved for members of their own generation. It seems to me also possible that what was really lacking was the religious sense, which they scrupulously and on principle avoided. Unless men are bound together by a sense of religious searching, a quest so important that everyone in relation to it is as dust, they can only be suspicious of each other, and they become imprisoned in attitudes which they have invented for themselves as a formula for getting through life, and they despise everyone who does not share these attitudes.

If one had said to any of these people: "Our world is falling to pieces, a fact which, in your art you admit. It is time now to go back to some kind of living which corresponds to the life of the monasteries. Let us group together and plan a kind of life where we can do our best work and live virtuously," they would have been shocked. They would have found such naiveté, such "seriousness" embarrassing and absurd, and they would have been more distressed than if one had told them some pornographic story. Views passionately held offended their sense of good taste.

What was sacred among them was "personal relationships." But here again I could not wholly subscribe to their sense of loyalty. For it seems to me that personal relationships are stifling unless there is freedom in them. There is freedom only if friends base their friendship not only on each other but also on some object beyond each other: work, or belief, or the service of the world or perhaps even an abstract conception of friendship which demands high standards of them. Thus when E. M. Forster in his essay *What I Believe* writes that if he had to choose between sacrificing his country and his friend, he hopes that he would choose to sacrifice his country, I am

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at a loss to know what this means. If his country is a bad cause, then no one would expect him to sacrifice anyone to it. But if it is a good cause for which Forster would be ready to sacrifice himself, then one would think that the basis of friendship was agreement about ideas which each friend would sacrifice himself for. So that the question of sacrificing one's country for one's friend could not arise in an enduring friendship, for the friend would be willing to sacrifice himself. If he were not, it seems difficult to think that the friendship could survive, if such a sacrifice were demanded.

When I was twenty, a friend sent some of my poems to T. S. Eliot, and a few weeks later I met him for the first time in one of those London Clubs where I have met him so often since. His appearance was grave, slightly bowed, aquiline, ceremonious, with something withdrawn, about his glance. When Eliot orders a drink or inclines over the menu to order a meal the effect is such as to produce a hush. It is a priestly act as he says in a grave voice: "Now will you have turtle soup (I doubt whether it will be made from *real* turtles) or green pea soup." On the occasion of one of our first meals, I disturbed him a little by announcing that I would choose smoked eel to eat. I was rather surprised to hear him say "I don't think I dare eat smoked eel," thus unconsciously paraphrasing Mr. Prufrock.

Eliot's conversation is gravely insistent. It does not give the impression of exceptional energy, but it has a kind of drive all its own, as it proceeds along its rigid lines. He cannot be interrupted or made to change the subject. Here one has insight into the working of his mind. Once he has got onto a topic, one cannot get him off it and he is liable to exhaust it pretty thoroughly. For example, the weather: I say it is a fine day, and Eliot says gravely: "Yes, it is fine today, but it was still finer yesterday—" with a faint hint in his voice that when I described today as "fine," I was not choosing the word altogether exactly. However, he continues about the weather: "If I remember rightly this time last year the lilac—" and then it is quite probable that if one has gone on listening carefully, out of this dry climate there will suddenly strike a few words of poetry like a kingfisher's wing across the club room conversation. His voice alone, grave, suggesting a bowed gesture, almost trembling at moments, and yet strangely strong and sustained—his voice alone is Eliot.

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If Eliot talks seriously about all subjects, he can also talk seriously about serious ones, including poetry. At this first luncheon, he asked me what I wanted to do with my life. I said "be a poet." "I can understand your wanting to write poems, but I don't quite know what you mean by 'being a poet'," he objected. I said I didn't only want to write poems, I wanted to do other things as well. He said that poetry was a task which required the energy of a whole lifetime. I said I would like to write novels as well as poems like, well, like Thomas Hardy. He answered that the poems of Hardy had always struck him as being the poems of someone who wrote novels. "What about Goethe?" I asked. He replied that he thought the case of Goethe was rather similar to that of Hardy.

This was indeed serious, and still gives me much food for thought. On another occasion, at a party in the drawing room of Lady Ottoline Morrell, there was a group of people hostile to orthodox religion, though in other ways extremely conventional, and also Eliot. One of them said in the voice of the self-righteously irreligious, while the others waited in silence: "Tom, please tell us, what do you feel when you pray?" There was a silence during which Eliot bowed his head and then in a voice stronger than usual he described conscientiously and scrupulously his struggle to pray, and, as often in his poetry, there was an impression of wings striving towards a throne.

Quite early in our relationship, I wrote a review of a volume of his essays, criticizing Eliot's political attitudes and some of the implications of his traditionalism. After I had published this, it grieved me to have done so, and I sent a copy of the review to him with a letter. Eliot wrote back a letter which, while disagreeing with one or two points in my review, was full of warmth and gentleness. He ended by saying that I must always feel free to say exactly what I felt when I criticized him and that this had no connection with our personal relationship.

At about the same time as I received this letter from Eliot, Harold Nicolson told me of a painful experience he had had after criticizing rather unfavorably the novel of a friend. Grieving, as I had done, he wrote a letter of explanation and apology to this friend. A few days later he got back a letter which ran (as I remember) something like this: "Little as I can forgive you for stabbing me in the back in public, I can forgive still less that you should apologize

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in private." This, alas, is the kind of reaction I have myself occasionally felt when attacked.

Yet, really, what we are in ourselves and in intimate private relations, is very different from what we are in public. Is it not the most absurd kind of vanity that we should try to exercise a censorship over our public personalities? To a limited extent, perhaps we are entitled to expect that our friends should be careful in what they say about us, not so much for our own sakes as for the sake of not putting too great a strain on the friendship itself, which we value. But we have no patent over that image of ourselves which we project into other people's minds and which has far more to do with themselves than with what we really are. If we analyze it, only base reasons of prestige and commercial status make us object to what is said about us by people for whom we do not care greatly in any case. And even those who do care have the right to distinguish our private from our public personality, and to discuss the public, which is public property, publicly. Extreme sensitivity to criticism shows a commercial spirit. Virginia Woolf once said to me: "Criticism upsets me sometimes as I would be upset if someone came into this room and broke the most expensive vase in it. I am very annoyed at the moment, as I would be about the vase. But then I forget." This is a very accurate account of a right state of mind.

(To be continued in the next issue)

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Isaac Babel

THE SIN OF JESUS

Arina was a servant at the hotel. She lived next to the main staircase, while Serega, the janitor's helper, he lived over the backstairs. Between them there was shame. On Palm Sunday Arina gave Serega a present—twins. Water flows, stars shine, a man lusts, and soon Arina was big again, her sixth month was rolling by—they're slippery, a woman's months. And now Serega must go into the army. There's a mess for you!

So Arina goes and says: "No sense, Sergunia, there's no sense in my waiting for you. For four years we'll be parted, and in four years, whatever way you look at it, I'll be sure to bring two or three more into this world. It's like walking around with your skirt turned up, working at the hotel. Whoever stops here, he's your master, let him be a Jew, let him be anybody at all. By the time you come home, my insides will be no good any more, I'll be a used-up woman, no match for you."

"That's so," Serega nodded.

"There's many that want me. Trofimych the contractor—but he's no gentleman. And Isai Abramych, the warden of Nikolo-Sviatski church, a feeble old man, but anyway I'm sick to the stomach of your murderous strength. I tell you this now, and I say it like I would at confession, I've got the wind plain knocked out of me. . . . I'll spill my load in three months, then I'll take the baby to the orphanage and marry the old man."

When Serega heard this, he took off his belt and beat her like a hero, right on the belly.

"Look out there," Arina says to him, "go soft on the belly, it's your stuffing, no one else's. . . . "

There was no end to the beating, no end to the man's tears

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and the woman's blood, but that is neither here nor there.

Then the woman came to Jesus Christ.

"So and so," she says, "Lord Jesus. I am the woman Arina from the Hotel Madrid and Louvre, the one on Tverskaya Street. Working at the hotel, it's like going around with your skirt up. Just let a man stop there, and he's your lord and master, let him be a Jew, let him be anybody at all. There is another slave of yours walking the earth, the janitor's helper, Serega. Last year on Palm Sunday I bore him twins. . . . "

And so she described it all to the Lord.

"And what if Serega were not to go into the army at all?" the Saviour suggested.

"Try and get away with it—not with the policeman around. He'll drag him off as sure as daylight. . . . "

"Oh yes, the policeman," the Lord bowed his head, "I never thought of him. . . . Then perhaps you ought to live in purity for a while? . . . ."

"For four years?" the woman cried. "To hear you talk, all people should deny their animal nature. That's just your old ways all over again. And where will the increase come from? No, you'd better give me some sensible advice. . .. "

The Lord's cheeks turned scarlet, the woman's words had touched a tender spot. But he said nothing. You cannot kiss your own ear—even God knows that.

"I'll tell you what, God's servant, glorious sinner, maiden Arina," the Lord proclaimed in all his glory, "I have a little angel here in heaven, hanging around uselessly. His name is Alfred. Lately he's gotten out of hand altogether, keeps crying and nagging all the time: 'What have you done to me, Lord, why did you turn me into an angel in my twentieth year, and me a hale young fellow?' So I'll give you Alfred the angel as a husband for four years. He'll be your prayer, he'll be your protection, and he'll be your solace. And as for offspring, you've nothing to worry about—you can't bear a duckling from him, let alone a baby, for there's a lot of fun in him, but no seriousness. . . . "

"That's just what I need," the maid Arina wept gratefully. "Their seriousness takes me to the doorstep of the grave three times every two years. . . . "

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"You'll have a sweet respite, God's child Arina, may your prayer be light as a song. Amen."

And so it was decided. Alfred was brought in—a frail young fellow, delicate, two wings fluttering behind his pale-blue shoulders, rippling with rosy lights like two doves playing in heaven. Arina threw her hefty arms about him, weeping out of tenderness, out of her woman's soft heart.

"Alfred, my soul, my consolation, my bridegroom. . . . "

In parting, the Lord gave her strict instructions to take off the angel's wings every night before he went to bed. His wings were attached to hinges, like a door, and every night she was to take them off and wrap them in a clean sheet, because they were brittle, his wings, and could snap as he tossed in bed—for what were they made of but the sighs of babes, no more than that.

For the last time the Lord blessed the union, while the choir of bishops, called in for the occasion, rendered thunderous praises. No food was served, not a crumb—that wasn't the style in heaven—and then Arina and Alfred, their arms about each other, ran down a silken ladder, straight back to earth. They came to Petrovka, where nothing but the best is sold—the woman would do right by her Alfred!—(and he, if one might say so, not only lacking socks, but altogether natural just as his mother bore him)—and she bought him patent leather half-boots, checked jersey trousers, a fine hunting jacket, and an electric blue vest.

"The rest," she says, "we'll find at home. . . . "

That day Arina begged off from work. Serega came, raised a fuss, but she did not even come out to him, only said from behind her locked door:

"Sergei Nifantich, I am at present laving my feet and beg you to retire without more noise. . . . "

He went away without a word—the angel's power was already beginning to manifest itself!

In the evening Arina set out a supper fit for a merchant—the woman had devilish vanity! A half-pint of vodka, wine on the side, a Danube herring with potatoes, a samovar of tea. When Alfred had partaken of all these earthly blessings, he keeled over in a dead sleep. Quick as a wink, Arina lifted off his wings from the hinges, packed them away, and carried him to bed in her arms.

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There it lies, the snowy wonder on the eiderdown pillows of her tattered, sinful bed, sending forth a heavenly radiance; moon-silver shafts of light pass and repass, alternate with red ones, float across the room, sway over his shining feet. Arina weeps and rejoices, sings and prays. Arina, thou hast been granted a happiness unheard of on this battered earth, blessed art thou among women!

They had drunk the vodka to the last drop, and now it took effect. As soon as they fell asleep, she went and rolled over on top of Alfred with her hot, six-months'-big belly. Not enough for her to sleep with an angel, not enough that nobody beside her spat at the wall, snored and snorted—that wasn't enough for the clumsy, ravening slut. No, she had to warm her belly too, her burning belly big with Serega's lust. And so she smothered him in her fuddled sleep, smothered him in the midst of her rejoicing like a week-old babe, crushed him under her bloated weight, and he gave up the ghost, and his wings, wrapped in her sheet, wept pale tears.

Dawn came—and all the trees bowed low to the ground. In distant northern forests each fir tree turned into a priest, each fir tree bent its knees in silent worship.

Once more the woman stands before the Lord's throne—broad in the shoulders, mighty, the young corpse drooping in her huge red arms.

"Behold, Lord. . . . "

But here the gentle heart of Jesus could endure no longer, and he cursed the woman in his anger:

"As it is on earth, so shall it be with you, Arina, from this day on. . . . "

"How is it then, Lord," the woman replied in a scarce audible voice, "was it I who made my body heavy, was it I that brewed vodka on earth, was it I that created a woman's soul, stupid and lonely? . . . ."

"I don't wish to be bothered with you," exclaimed the Lord Jesus, "you've smothered my angel, you filthy scum. . . . "

And Arina was thrown back to earth on a putrid wind, straight down to Tverskaya Street, to the Hotel Madrid and Louvre, where she was doomed to spend her days. And once there—the sky's the limit. Serega was carousing, drinking away his last days, seeing as he was a recruit. The contractor Trofimych, just come from Ko-

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lomna, took one look at Arina, hefty and red-cheeked: "Oh, you cute little belly," he says, and so forth.

Isai Abramych, the old codger, heard about this cute little belly and he is right there, too, wheezing toothlessly:

"I cannot wed you lawfully," he says, "after all that happened. However, I can lie with you the same as anyone. . . . "

The old man ought to be lying in cold mother earth instead of thinking such things, but no, he too must take his turn at spitting into her soul. It was like everybody breaking off a chain—kitchen boys, merchants, foreigners. A trading man—he likes to have his fun.

And that is the end of my tale.

Before she was laid up, because three months had rolled by in the meantime, Arina went out into the backyard, behind the janitor's rooms, raised her monstrous huge belly to the silken sky and said stupidly:

"See, Lord, what a belly. They hammer at it like peas out of a bursting pod. And what's the sense in it—I cannot see. And furthermore, I have no wish to see. . . . "

With his tears Jesus washed Arina when he heard these words, on his knees the Saviour dropped before her.

"Forgive me, Arinushka, forgive your sinful God. What have I done to you? . . . . "

But Arina shook her head and would not listen.

"There's no forgiveness for you, Jesus Christ," she said, "no forgiveness at all, none."

(Translated from the Russian by Mirra Ginsburg)

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MODERN EVIDENCE

Rudolf Kassner

RAINER MARIA RILKE: A REMINISCENCE*

June, 1914—We were both guests at Duino, the castle on the Adriatic Sea where Rilke had written the first of his *Duino Elegies* three years earlier. (Since then the castle has been destroyed by Italian shells and rebuilt by its owner.) One afternoon, in the so-called "game-park," a walled-in reservation of very old oak trees and laurel bushes from whose branches a wild dove rose now and then, we came to speak of Christ—of Christ the god-man and mediator rather than the anguished heroic figure of the gospel. What Rilke told me then seemed to me characteristic of him. He said he did not want a mediator between himself and God; he was unable to understand such a mediator, who would only prevent him from acknowledging God and from approaching Him. Christ, he felt, was in his way. . . .

One of his poems deals with Jesus Christ: "The Garden of Olives" (in the "New Poems"):

Ich bin allein mit aller Menschen Gram,
den Ich durch Dich zu lindern unternahm,
der Du nicht bist. O namenlose Scham. . . .

(I am alone with all the sorrow of mankind,
That I set out to soothe through Thee,
Thou who art not; O bitter, wordless shame. . . .)

Yes, he could love this disillusioned and doubting Jesus whose "forehead was covered with dust"; but not the one whom the apostle calls the king of life, not Him who became lord and master through His sacrifice.

Rilke wanted only the Father. Rilke's world was in every respect

* This is an excerpt from *Narciss, oder Mythos und Einbildungskraft*. The author is well known to German readers for his writing dealing in a poetical-mystical manner with problems of art and metaphysics.

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the world of the father, the world of the child, of childlike games, of childlike guilt.There was no other guilt but that:

Und manchmal brachen Knaben aus den Bergen
der Kindheit, kamen zagen Falles nieder
und spielten mit den Dingen auf dem Grunde,
bis das Gefälle ihr Gefühl ergriff. . . .

(And sometimes boys broke from the mountains
Of childhood, came down the sides with hesitating steps
And played with things they found there at the bottom
Until they sensed the steepness of the slope.)

And thus Rilke's poetry (until the *Duino Elegies*) was a pledge of allegiance to the realm of the Father from the realm of childhood and of boyhood. Among his early works there is one play; but Rilke was not a dramatist at all and later he would not have attempted a drama even for the sake of the form. The final reason remains this: in a drama he would somehow have had to deal with the world of the Son, with the world of guilt, of responsibility, of freedom.

Once, when I reproached him for his leniency towards a certain poetic work, he told me with great excitement he did not want to criticize, he did not care. In truth, the conflict between judgment and feeling which is so masculine, so peculiar to men, did not exist for him. He did not understand such men at all. In Rilke's world the man remained an intruder; only children, women, and old people were at home in it. And in the world of children, women, and old people this conflict is, after all, senseless. In the realm of the Son there is only one who has overcome the conflict: the mystic. But Hermann von Keyserling is right when he writes that Rilke is not in the least a mystic.

It was the autumn of 1910 in Paris. At that time I was writing my *Elemente der menschlichen Grösse,* in which I dared for the first time to speak of Christ in what seemed to me to be a proper manner. Rilke and I were together almost daily from five o'clock in the afternoon until late at night. Once, on returning to my hotel after talking to him about himself and his work, I wrote in my notebook: "From fervor to greatness there is only one road: it leads through the sacrifice." Later when Rilke read this in *Sätzen des Joghi* (Sayings of the Yogi) he wrote me: "I have copied this sentence for myself. It is somehow for and against me."

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He did not want the sacrifice, or rather, he wanted only the sacrifice of the Old Testament (the fruits of the field, a lamb or whatever else is dear to man), but not that of the New Testament. He did not want to find value in sacrifice, or in conversion. Read the eighth of his *Duino Elegies*. It is dedicated to me and in it he turns against the idea of conversion which he found in my books. The animal is not converted—the animal lives in the world of the Father. The greatness of the Father world was entirely contained in *being*, and that is right. With the Son greatness becomes divorced from *being*. The Son is great, but the Father *is*. Rilke was not without rancor towards the Son. Examples of this may be found in a few poems in the second volume of the "New Poems." In the struggle between character and conviction—that is, between the inherent, the intuitive, and the attitude which is formed by judgment—Rilke chose character. Of Germany's important poets none was less burgherlike than he. And only insofar as the German spirit is in every way the most burgherlike of all Europe was Rilke un-German. In no other respect. He loved France because he saw in it the superior character. It would be entirely wrong to regard Rilke's love for France merely as the German love for the foreign. Thus the English manner, the English language always remained strange to him, and he could not be persuaded to go to London. An American seemed to him monstrous; the Italian not quite clear and therefore not very important. Conviction, attitude could never replace for him the absent character. Character came before convictions. Rilke has been contrasted with Richard Dehmel. But the basis of all antithesis is equivalence. Richard Dehmel's entirely overrated work is full of conviction, full—if you like—of titanic conviction, but without character.

The Son has not been here in vain. We cannot disregard him. Without greatness the world, however glorious its beginning, is bound to become in the end a place of isolation, of the lonely in the sense of young Malte, of people with a tic (of the soul). There are two kinds of humor: one kind is that of Sterne, Jean Paul, Kierkegaard, that of men of the spirit. The man of the spirit sees both aspects of things. Those who see the world thus live in the realm of the Son in spite of everything. Rilke's very definite humor was of a different kind: of the realm of the Father. There things develop a tic, become

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a little ridiculous as they grow old. They become distorted through too much or too little experience, through the loneliness of experience. Because there arises a break between existing—the existing of childhood—and experience. Rilke's asceticism was not that of the spiritual world; his asceticism, too, was rooted in pleasure. That is what I call soul, Father world, Mother world. Many years ago he had developed the habit of going barefoot. Over long periods. What delighted him was the fact that by touching the earth with his naked soles he had developed, so to speak, a new sense in them. Or so he told me.

As a child Rilke grew up among eccentrics. In the old Austria, which has produced more *types* than any other country of Europe. In Prague, where the eccentric is endemic. When I visited him for the last time—1923—in Muzot, I asked him urgently to record his childhood reminiscences. We will soon have at our disposal an exceedingly great number of the very beautiful letters which he bestowed upon his friends (for many years his entire work consisted of the writing of such letters). I fear, however, that his childhood reminiscences were never recorded. During his last years he was preoccupied with his French poems or rather with the fact that he was now writing poetry in French. I remember a wonderful story from his childhood and I will tell it here as well as I can. His friends will know immediately what he, the incomparable storyteller among the many whom I have known, would make of something like this. In Prague there lived an elderly uncle of his, a bachelor. He had a single passion, a tic of the soul: birds. He filled a whole room with them. On a certain day of the week Rilke was allowed to visit the uncle. For lunch. Together with a little girl cousin. The uncle came from the bird room which was next to the dining room. Feathers stuck in his hair, in his beard; his suit was covered with them. No one else was allowed to enter the bird room. Whenever the uncle got up during the meal to bring the birds a small bone or a piece of fruit, the singing, calling, and screeching of many, many birds could be heard through the opened door. But one day all this was over. No more cages, no singing and screeching, no more feathers in the uncle's beard and hair. Instead of the birds, a red-haired, freckled, colorfully dressed person with a loud voice. All those many birds, whom no one had ever seen, had transformed themselves into this woman who from then on never left the uncle and who finally buried him.

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Just as Rilke was not religious in any significant sense, so he was not a man of pity nor indeed in any way socially disposed. Especially as to the religious element in him the prevalent notions are quite mistaken. I admit openly that I find the idea of the "neighbor God" unbearable. He did not love the poor for the sake of the Son but because they stand outside the ordinary, because they are unburgherlike. Poverty and wealth find their meaning in each other. In the realm of the Father. The Son has shifted their emphasis. I can even now hear his laugh, that very large mouth's strange laugh, which was like a reversed sucking and before which everything flew and scattered, when I said to him—at the station in Brig where he had accompanied me—"Rilke, I personally have certainly found a strange confirmation of your world, your ending world: you see, I have met so many wonderful old maids in my life and so incredibly many foolish mothers. It really seems as though the clever virgins of the parable had all become old maids and the foolish ones all mothers. At the same time it is clear proof that we have been forever cast out of the Mother world of Bachofen and Schuler."

Rilke always showed a special liking for those beings whom the world of men calls old maids. Not so much from pity in the vague sense of the "careless" man, but because he approached the woman from the woman's point of view. Rilke was devoted to women as perhaps no other man before him. That is why the so-called beautiful woman did not exist for him. She too is a creation of the "careless" man, the dilettante who does not penetrate at all or merely in a "careless" manner. His love too is without the Son's greatness or has been proven false by it. That is why only women can truly give this kind of love. "We are spoiled by the easy enjoyment of mastery, like all dilettantes, and we have the reputation of mastery," Rilke writes in *The Journal of My Other Self*. "How would it be, though, if we scorned our successes; what if we returned to the very beginning to learn the work of love that has always been done for us."

It is only because everything is love and all "greatness" lies in love and never outside it that some things in Rilke are, perhaps decoration, flourish, ornament, and play. But nothing, nothing is cliché. Which accounts for his wonderful unity. Rilke was poet, was personality even when he merely washed his hands. The only entirely dreadful memory of his life were the years he spent in the St. Pölten

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military academy. The military was to him a cliché of the devil; it was the world become cliché. Thus even his education was without cliché. I can still see the astonishment on Geheimrat Bode's military face when Rilke confessed to him at Duino that he had never read *Hamlet*.

That which might be considered aestheticism in his work was not a lack of greatness but the absence of the cliché of greatness. Or: his real greatness lay in the unity of form and content. But he wanted to go beyond that. He wanted to reach a new "greatness" which, by his nature, he must have conceived of not as the greatness of the hero, but as the greatness of *mythos*. He too saw in the late poems of Hölderlin the triumph of art over art—a new *mythos* or the attempt at one. The immortal *Duino Elegies* are an attempt in this direction: to achieve the triumph of art over art.

(*Translated from the German by Maria Gassler*)

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ART CHRONICLE

THE ROLE OF NATURE IN MODERN PAINTING

> "And where there is no concern for reality how can you limit and unite plastic liberties."—Juan Gris in a letter to Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, quoted in the latter's *Juan Gris: His Life and Work* (translated by Douglas Cooper).
>
> "The difference between Expressionism and Cubism is that of the painter's object."—Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *Ibid.*

One of the important problems of contemporary art criticism is to ascertain how Cubism—that purest and most unified of all art styles since Tiepolo and Watteau—arrived at its characteristic form of purity and unity. We know how much French painting of the forty-five years previous to Cubism had contributed by its effort towards a more immediate and franker realization of painting as a physical medium, with the new recognition this entailed of the two-dimensionality of the picture plane and of painting's right to be independent of illusion. But this recognition was shared in the twentieth century by the Nabis, the Fauves, and the French and German Expressionists as well as the Cubists. The latter, however, established a larger and much more viable style than did the other schools, a style within which at least four artists have produced masterpieces that reach any of the summits of past art, and a style, moreover, to which contemporary visual sensibility refers for its most authoritative standard. And so we ask what it was that enabled Cubism to win this supremacy. We remember that Matisse painted his strongest pictures, between 1910 and 1920, while under its influence. And it was Cubism's influence that made the difference between promise and realization in Klee's case. Whereas Kandinsky, an artist of genius, never achieved anything even at his best that can stand up to the productions of Picasso, Braque, Gris, and Léger in their prime, precisely because of his failure to make a real contact with Cubism.

The decisive difference between Cubism and the other movements appears to lie in its relation to nature. The paradox of French painting between Courbet and Cézanne is that, while in effect departing further and further from illusionism, it was driven in its most important manifestations by the conscious desire to give an account of nature that would

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be more accurate or faithful *in context* than any before. The context was the medium, whose claims—the limitations imposed by the flat surface, the canvas's shape, and the nature of the pigments—had to be accommodated to those of nature. The previous century of painting had erred in not granting the claims of the medium sufficiently and Cézanne, in particular, proposed to remedy this while at the same time giving an even more essentially accurate transcription of nature's appearance. As it turned out, the movement that began with Cézanne eventually culminated in abstract art, which permitted the claims of the medium to over-ride those of nature almost entirely. Yet before that happened, nature did succeed in stamping itself so indelibly on modern painting that its stamp has remained even in an art as abstract as Mondrian's. What was stamped was not the appearance of nature, however, but its logic.

Cubism, which effected the break with the appearance of nature, set itself originally to the task of establishing on a flat surface the completest possible conceptual image of the structure of objects or volumes. While the Impressionists had been interested in the purely visual sensations with which nature presented them at the given moment, the Cubists were mainly occupied with the generalized forms and relations of the surfaces of volumes, describing and analyzing them in a simplified way that omitted the color and the "accidental" attributes of the objects that served them as models. Taking their cue from Cézanne, they sought for the decisive structure of things that lay permanently under the accidents of momentary appearance, and to do this they were willing to violate the norms of appearance by showing an object from more than one point of view on the same picture plane. But in the end they did not find a completer way of describing the structure of objects on a flat surface—blueprints and engineer's drawings could do that more adequately and had already withdrawn the task from the province of art. Instead, the Cubists found the structure of the picture. They had never forgotten that; in fact, it was their main purpose, and their quest for a better way of transcribing the relations of volumes had been conceived of not as a scientific project but as a quest, ultimately, for a means of creating more firmly organized pictures; this, they had thought, required a truer, completer imitation of nature.

But Picasso and Braque discovered that it was not the essential description of the visible relations of volumes in nature or the more emphatic rendition of their three-dimensionality that could guarantee the organization of a pictorial work of art. On the contrary, to do these things actually disrupted that organization. By dint of their efforts to discover pictorially the structure of objects, of bodies, in nature, Picasso

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and Braque had come—almost abruptly, it would seem—to a new realization of, and new respect for, the nature of the picture plane itself as a material object; and they came to the further realization that only by transposing the internal logic by which objects are organized in nature could aesthetic form be given to the irreducible flatness which defined the picture plane in its inviolable quality as a material object. This flatness became the final, all-powerful premise of the art of painting, and the experience of nature could be transposed into it only by analogy, not by imitative reproduction.* Thus the painter abandoned his interest in the concrete appearance, for example, of a glass and tried instead to approximate by analogy the way in which nature had married the straight contours that defined the glass vertically to the curved ones that defined it laterally. Nature no longer offered appearances to imitate, but principles to parallel.

The Renaissance painter, too, had learned to organize his picture from nature. But for him it was the logic of appearance that mattered rather than the logic of somatic structure. He ordered his illusions by analogy with the Renaissance view of the world as a free space in which separate forms move. The Cubists, viewing the world as a continuum, a dense somatic entity (as was dictated by their age), had to strive to organize the picture—itself an object—by analogy with the single object abstracted from surrounding space and by analogy with the space relations between the different parts of one and the same object. Pictorial space became more cohesive and cramped, not only in depth, but also in relation to the edges of the canvas. (One can, for that matter, already notice in Manet how much more crowded the picture begins to be toward its edges. Think, by contrast, of the immense space in which Rembrandt's figures swim.)

The positivist aesthetic of the twentieth century, which refuses the individual art the right to refer explicitly to anything beyond its own realm of sensations, was driving the Cubist painter toward the flat, non-illusionist picture in any case, but it is doubtful whether he would have been able to make such superlative art of it as he did without the guidance of nature. Forced to invent an aesthetic logic *ex nihilo* (which never happens in art anyway), without reference to the logic by which bodies are organized in actual space, the Cubists would never have arrived at that sense of the totality, integrity, economy and indivisibility

* The process by which Cubism, in pushing naturalism to its ultimate limits and over-emphasizing modeling—which is perhaps the most important means of naturalism in painting—arrived at the antithesis of naturalism, flat abstract art, might be considered a case of "dialectical conversion."

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of the pictorial work of art—an object in its turn too—which governs genuine Cubist style. By drawing an analogy with the way in which an object's form and identity possess every grain of the substance of which it is composed, the Cubists were able to give their main problem, that of the unity of the flat picture plane, a strict and durable solution.

As the poem, play, or novel depends for its final principle of form on the prevailing conception of the essential structure that integrates an event or cluster of events in actuality, so the form of a picture depends always on a similar conception of the structure that integrates visual experience "in nature." The spontaneous integrity and completeness of the event or thing seen guides the artist in forming the invented event or object that is the work of art. This seems to me to be always true, but it is particularly important to point it out in the case of Cubism since Cubism has evolved into abstract art, and abstract art seems—but only seems—to conceal its relation to nature.

Picasso, Braque, Gris, Léger, Klee are never able to dispense with the object in nature as a starting point, no matter how far they may go at times toward the abstract. Without the support of nature, Picasso and Braque would not have had the means of organizing their beautiful collages, utterly remote from their models as they seem, into the intense unities which they are. The integrity, the self-subsistent, harmonious fact of mandolin, bottle, or wineglass called up an echo that was largely unrecognizable no doubt, but which became as valid, because of its form, within the order of art as the original perception of the mandolin or bottle was within the order of practical experience.

Other, later masters have been able to do without the object as a starting point. But I feel that outright abstract painting, including Mondrian's, when it is successful establishes its aesthetic right in the same way, ultimately, as did the masterpieces of Cubism—by referring to the integrity of objects in nature. Mondrian's pictures certainly do. It is not because they are abstract that the works of the later Kandinsky and his followers fail to achieve coherence and substantiality, remaining for the most part mere pieces of arbitrary decoration; it is because they lack a sense of style, a feeling for the unity of the picture as an object; that is, they lack almost all reference to the structure of nature. The best modern painting, though it is mostly abstract painting, remains naturalistic in its core, despite all appearances to the contrary. It refers to the structure of the given world both outside and inside human beings. The artist who, like the Nabis, the later Kandinsky, and so many of the disciples of the Bauhaus, tries to refer to anything else walks in a void.

Clement Greenberg

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THEATER CHRONICLE

A PRINCE OF SHREDS AND PATCHES

HAMLET, William Shakespeare, Park Avenue Theater

"You *liked* the Laurence Olivier *Hamlet?*" breathed a young woman the other day in a shocked undertone, when I mentioned the fact at a party. She herself had not seen the film, the news that it did not employ "the full resources of the cinema" having reached her in time. "And I hear Fortinbras has been cut," she continued, with an inquiring glance into my features, "not to mention Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. And that the Queen is too young, and the Oedipal theme over-emphasized." From these objections one could not wholly dissent. The film is indeed a photographed play, though why a photograph of a play by Shakespeare should be such an inferior article it is hard to know—would a movie which had "liberated" itself from the text be really preferable? The other objections are more forceful. The Queen, who looks a buxom thirty-five, *is* too well preserved: if the gravedigger's memory does not betray him, Hamlet himself is thirty, middle age to an Elizabethan, a fact, however, which Shakespeare himself seems unmindful of, moved as he is by the poignancy of Hamlet's youth, his blighted studies, and unseasonable death. In the openly erotic scenes between mother and son, the film is all too cinematic—what can the Court be thinking, the audience asks itself; why does no one appear to notice these scandalous goings-on? The omission of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern no one greatly complains of, but Fortinbras is a different thing. He is as necessary to the play as Hotspur to the first Henry Fourth. Insofar as *Hamlet* is a study of different kinds of young men, he, Hamlet, and Horatio make a triad of *virtus,* as Osric, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern make a triad of puerility. The play's frame, moreover, is *the soldier's music and the rites of war*; beginning with an armed watch, it ends on a peal of ordnance. Horatio is unfitted to sound the martial note. Military funerals are not in his line; he is the perennial student, like Raskolnikov's friend, Razumikhin, the honest pedant, a little Germanized, the uncouth and good-hearted intellectual. And it is characteristic of the Shakespearean irony and tenderness that peace should descend on the play to the sound of drum and bugle: the simplicities of war, the rules of the field are order and blessed tranquillity when set against the drama of blood and perfidy that has played itself out in the castle. To Fortinbras, the outsider, the man who happens to be passing, the heap of corpses in the hall is a prodigious and unnatural sight. Clean up this mess, he commands, and, touched by something in the

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dead young prince's aspect, remarks that he might have made a fine soldier, too bad he never had the chance. Without this tonic fresh presence, the dead march at the finale is merely a pageant of woe.

There are other times when the Olivier *Hamlet* is perhaps oversumptuous with the décor of feeling, too interpretive, heavy on the pathos and light on the ethos, as in the bedroom scene, the To be or not to be speech, the drowning of Ophelia, and, above all, in those taffeta glances slid by the camera over the marriage couch. Yet the temptation to the picturesque, the scenic, is in the text itself. There is no tragedy of Shakespeare in which so much play is made with hand-props: Enter Hamlet reading, Hamlet writing in his tables, Hamlet with the mirror, Hamlet with the recorder, Hamlet with the skull. Hamlet's appearances in the play are a succession of pictorial attitudes, as though the glass of fashion were reflecting what was being worn heraldically that year by the model Renaissance man. Reading the uncut *Hamlet,* one cannot fail to be struck by the efficiency with which the hero is put through his paces. Not the least baffling aspect of Hamlet's character is that it often appears to be a mere congeries of "parts": the soliloquies themselves, so disturbing to the line of the action, seem half displays of virtuosity, just as if they had been inserted to show off to best advantage the powers of the principal actor. And the great anomaly, Hamlet's madness, is the actor's supreme opportunity.

What might be called the Mannerist style in which the hero is presented, moreover, is not the only example of a kind of showmanship and professionalism in this otherwise Orestean tragedy. The play is a veritable county fair of attractions. There are the two recitations, Hamlet's and the First Player's, the Dumb Show, the Play, a Danish March, flourish upon flourish of kettledrums, sound of cannon, Fortinbras' army on the Plain of Denmark, Ophelia's flower-strewn mad scenes, the Ghost—a profusion of stage-effects, a mime-show of marvels. In a sense *nothing* happens in *Hamlet* because everything happens on the same level of interest and thus, so to speak, simultaneously. What is seen is a series of pictures, vivid, brief, isolated. Hamlet, his mother, Claudius are so many shivered fragments. "A king of shreds and patches," Hamlet says of Claudius in a line that has been omitted from the Olivier version. He might also have been speaking of himself or of the play which he gives his name to. Hypocrisy, broken faith, playacting, imposture are the characterological norm of reeling Elsinore. The fissure between *is* and *seems* cracks the world open. *Hamlet* is enigmatic because it is completely histrionic—everybody is playing a part.

This peculiar jerkiness, both in Hamlet's character and in the play as a whole, may be explained by the assumption, put forward by one scholar, that the play is a hasty composite of several earlier lost *Hamlets* pieced together so haphazardly that the dicordances were never noticed. The text may have been improvised to serve the needs of an acting

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company or it may express some interior derangement on the part of the author or, very likely, both. In any case, this unsteadiness, which is the most striking feature of *Hamlet,* is the thing which most acted versions begin by trying to eliminate, either by "interpretation" or by a kind of glaze imparted to the diction that makes it (a) inaudible and (b) all of a piece. Sir Laurence Olivier's is the only *Hamlet* which seizes this inconsecutiveness and makes of it an image of suffering, of the failure to feel steadily, to be able to compose a continuous pattern, which is the most harrowing experience of man. Hamlet, a puzzle to himself, is seen by Olivier as a boy, whose immaturity is both his grace and his frailty. The uncertainty as to what is real, the disgust, the impulsiveness, the arbitrary shifts of mood, the recklessness, the high spirits, all incomprehensible in those middle-aged, speechifying Hamlets to whom our stage is habituated, here become suddenly irradiated. The play appears to be not so much a drama but a kind of initiation ceremony, barbaric like all such rituals, in which the novice is killed.

Already, in his first scene, Hamlet is grieving for the death of his father, but woodenly, uncomprehendingly, bitterly, as a child grieves who refuses to countenance that such things can happen in the world. The Ghost's appearance is to him almost an adventure. He rushes down from his interview full of jokes and wildness; his boredom is gone—at last he has something to do. But the Ghost's commission is not really Quixotic. The enterprise loses its zest with Hamlet's recognition that it is an actual man he must kill, his uncle, whom he knows very well, a sleazy piece of the old, tedious reality. Bored, sullen, and angry, he diverts himself by tormenting Ophelia, whom he suspects of being One of Them. He baits her father, pretends to be mad, and then promptly sloughs his ennui when the players come, gives them a lecture on acting in the patronizing tone that comes easily to precocious, gifted young dilettantes, loses interest shortly, and sends them off for the night. Thoughts of suicide engage him; he wishes himself dead. Meanwhile, a marvelous plan has occurred to him; he will trap his uncle with the play. He draws Horatio into the game, but before the play is over, he has ceased to care about the result. Repelled by the sight of his uncle playing, he lets pass his opportunity and instead makes a row with his mother, kills Polonius and two minutes later has forgotten about *him* in the interests of a new idea—to get his mother to promise not to go to his uncle's bed. At this point, the forces of reality—middle-age, and cunning—themselves take charge of the action, and Hamlet, who has provoked them, is done for.

Whether or not this is the authentic creature of Shakespeare's imagination, it is impossible to say. Behind the gesture and the impulse is there a Hamlet at all? That is the question which in Olivier's unique performance is kept open and aching, like a wound.

Mary McCarthy

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George Orwell

REFLECTIONS ON GANDHI

Saints should always be judged guilty until they are proved innocent, but the tests that have to be applied to them are not, of course, the same in all cases. In Gandhi's case the questions one feels inclined to ask are: to what extent was Gandhi moved by vanity—by the consciousness of himself as a humble, naked old man, sitting on a praying-mat and shaking empires by sheer spiritual power—and to what extent did he compromise his own principles by entering into politics, which of their nature are inseparable from coercion and fraud? To give a definite answer one would have to study Gandhi's acts and writings in immense detail, for his whole life was a sort of pilgrimage in which every act was significant. But this partial autobiography, which ends in the nineteen-twenties, is strong evidence in his favor, all the more because it covers what he would have called the unregenerate part of his life and reminds one that inside the saint, or near-saint, there was a very shrewd, able person who could, if he had chosen, have been a brilliant success as a lawyer, and administrator or perhaps even a business man.

At about the time when the autobiography first appeared I remember reading its opening chapters in the ill-printed pages of some Indian newspaper. They made a good impression on me, which Gandhi himself, at that time, did not. The things that one associated with him—homespun cloth, "soul forces" and vegetarianism—were unappealing, and his medievalist program was obviously not viable in a backward, starving, over-populated country. It was also apparent that the British were making use of him, or thought they were making use of him. Strictly speaking, as a Nationalist, he was an enemy, but since in every crisis he would exert himself to prevent violence—which, from the British point of view, meant preventing any effective action whatever—he could be regarded as "our man." In private this was sometimes cynically admitted. The

* *The Story of my Experiments with Truth.* By M. K. Gandhi. Translated from the Gujarati by Mahadex Desai. Public Affairs Press. $5.00.

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attitude of the Indian millionaires was similar. Gandhi called upon them to repent, and naturally they preferred him to the Socialists and Communists who, given the chance, would actually have taken their money away. How reliable such calculations are in the long run is doubtful; as Gandhi himself says, "in the end deceivers deceive only themselves"; but at any rate the gentleness with which he was nearly always handled was due partly to the feeling that he was useful. The British Conservatives only became really angry with him when, as in 1942, he was in effect turning his non-violence against a different conqueror.

But I could see even then that the British officials who spoke of him with a mixture of amusement and disapproval also genuinely liked and admired him, after a fashion. Nobody ever suggested that he was corrupt, or ambitious in any vulgar way, or that anything he did was actuated by fear or malice. In judging a man like Gandhi one seems instinctively to apply high standards, so that some of his virtues have passed almost unnoticed. For instance, it is clear even from the autobiography that his natural physical courage was quite outstanding: the manner of his death was a later illustration of this, for a public man who attached any value to his own skin would have been more adequately guarded. Again, he seems to have been quite free from that maniacal suspiciousness which, as E. M. Forster rightly says in *A Passage to India,* is the besetting Indian vice, as hypocrisy is the British vice. Although no doubt he was shrewd enough in detecting dishonesty, he seems wherever possible to have believed that other people were acting in good faith and had a better nature through which they could be approached. And though he came of a poor middle-class family, started life rather unfavorably, and was probably of unimpressive physical appearance, he was not afflicted by envy or by the feeling of inferiority. Color feeling, when he first met it in its worst form in South Africa, seems rather to have astonished him. Even when he was fighting what was in effect a color war, he did not think of people in terms of race or status. The governor of a province, a cotton millionaire, a half-starved Dravidian cooly, a British private soldier, were all equally human beings, to be approached in much the same way. It is noticeable that even in the worst possible circumstances, as in South Africa when he was making himself unpopular as the champion of the Indian community, he did not lack European friends.

Written in short lengths for newspaper serialization, the autobiography is not a literary masterpiece, but it is the more impressive because of the commonplaceness of much of its material. It is well to be re-

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minded that Gandhi started out with the normal ambitions of a young Indian student and only adopted his extremist opinions by degrees and, in some cases, rather unwillingly. There was a time, it is interesting to learn, when he wore a top hat, took dancing lessons, studied French and Latin, went up the Eiffel Tower and even tried to learn the violin—all this with the idea of assimilating European civilization as thoroughly as possible. He was not one of those saints who are marked out by their phenomenal piety from childhood onwards, nor one of the other kind who forsake the world after sensational debaucheries. He makes full confession of the misdeeds of his youth, but in fact there is not much to confess. As a frontispiece to the book there is a photograph of Gandhi's possessions at the time of his death. The whole outfit could be purchased for about £5, and Gandhi's sins, at least his fleshly sins, would make the same sort of appearance if placed all in one heap. A few cigarettes, a few mouthfuls of meat, a few annas pilfered in childhood from the maidservant, two visits to a brothel (on each occasion he got away without "doing anything"), one narrowly escaped lapse with his landlady in Plymouth, one outburst of temper—that is about the whole collection. Almost from childhood onwards he had a deep earnestness, an attitude ethical rather than religious, but, until he was about thirty, no very definite sense of direction. His first entry into anything describable as public life was made by way of vegetarianism. Underneath his less ordinary qualities one feels all the time the solid middle-class business men who were his ancestors. One feels that even after he had abandoned personal ambition he must have been a resourceful, energetic lawyer and a hardheaded political organizer, careful in keeping down expenses, an adroit handler of committees and an indefatigable chaser of subscriptions. His character was an extraordinarily mixed one, but there was almost nothing in it that you can put your finger on and call bad, and I believe that even Gandhi's worst enemies would admit that he was an interesting and unusual man who enriched the world simply by being alive. Whether he was also a lovable man, and whether his teachings can have much value for those who do not accept the religious beliefs on which they are founded, I have never felt fully certain.

Of late years it has been the fashion to talk about Gandhi as though he were not only sympathetic to the Western leftwing movement, but were even integrally part of it. Anarchists and pacifists, in particular, have claimed him for their own, noticing only that he was opposed to centralism and State violence and ignoring the otherworldly, anti-humanist tendency of his doctrines. But one should, I think, realize that

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Gandhi's teachings cannot be squared with the belief that Man is the measure of all things and that our job is to make life worth living on this earth, which is the only earth we have. They make sense only on the assumption that God exists and that the world of solid objects is an illusion to be escaped from. It is worth considering the disciplines which Gandhi imposed on himself and which—though he might not insist on every one of his followers observing every detail—he considered indispensable if one wanted to serve either God or humanity. First of all, no meat-eating, and if possible no animal food in any form. (Gandhi himself, for the sake of his health, had to compromise on milk, but seems to have felt this to be a backsliding.) No alcohol or tobacco, and no spices or condiments, even of a vegetable kind, since food should be taken not for its own sake but solely in order to preserve one's strength. Secondly, if possible, no sexual intercourse. If sexual intercourse must happen, then it should be for the sole purpose of begetting children and presumably at long intervals. Gandhi himself, in his middle thirties, took the vow of *bramahcharya,* which means not only complete chastity but the elimination of sexual desire. This condition, it seems, is difficult to attain without a special diet and frequent fasting. One of the dangers of milk-drinking is that it is apt to arouse sexual desire. And finally—this is the cardinal point—for the seeker after goodness there must be no close friendships and no exclusive loves whatever.

Close friendships, Gandhi says, are dangerous, because "friends react on one another" and through loyalty to a friend one can be led into wrong-doing. This is unquestionably true. Moreover, if one is to love God, or to love humanity as a whole, one cannot give one's preference to any individual person. This again is true, and it marks the point at which the humanistic and the religious attitude cease to be reconcilable. To an ordinary human being, love means nothing if it does not mean loving some people more than others. The autobiography leaves it uncertain whether Gandhi behaved in an inconsiderate way to his wife and children, but at any rate it makes clear that on three occasions he was willing to let his wife or a child die rather than administer the animal food prescribed by the doctor. It is true that the threatened death never actually occurred, and also that Gandhi—with, one gathers, a good deal of moral pressure in the opposite direction—always gave the patient the choice of staying alive at the price of committing a sin: still, if the decision had been solely his own, he would have forbidden the animal food, whatever the risks might be. There must, he says, be some limit to what we will do in order to remain alive, and the limit is well on this side of chicken broth. This attitude is perhaps a noble one, but, in the

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sense which—I think—most people would give to the word, it is inhuman. The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection, that one *is* sometimes willing to commit sins for the sake of loyalty, that one does not push asceticism to the point where it makes friendly intercourse impossible, and that one is prepared in the end to be defeated and broken up by life, which is the inevitable price of fastening one's love upon other human individuals. No doubt alcohol, tobacco and so forth are things that a saint must avoid, but sainthood is also a thing that human beings must avoid. There is an obvious retort to this, but one should be wary about making it. In this yogi-ridden age, it is too readily assumed that "non-attachment" is not only better than a full acceptance of earthly life, but that the ordinary man only rejects it because it is too difficult: in other words, that the average human being is a failed saint. It is doubtful whether this is true. Many people genuinely do not wish to be saints, and it is probable that some who achieve or aspire to sainthood have never felt much temptation to be human beings. If one could follow it to its psychological roots, one would, I believe, find that the main motive for "non-attachment" is a desire to escape from the pain of living, and above all from love, which, sexual or non-sexual, is hard work. But it is not necessary here to argue whether the other-worldly or the humanistic ideal is "higher." The point is that they are incompatible. One must choose between God and Man, and all "radicals" and "progressives," from the mildest Liberal to the most extreme Anarchist, have in effect chosen Man.

However, Gandhi's pacifism can be separated to some extent from his other teachings. Its motive was religious, but he claimed also for it that it was a definite technique, a method, capable of producing desired political results. Gandhi's attitude was not that of most Western pacifists. *Satyagraha,* first evolved in South Africa, was a sort of non-violent warfare, a way of defeating the enemy without hurting him and without feeling or arousing hatred. It entailed such things as civil disobedience, strikes, lying down in front of railway trains, enduring police charges without running away and without hitting back, and the like. Gandhi objected to "passive resistance" as a translation of *Satyagraha*: in Gujarati, it seems, the word means "firmness in the truth." In his early days Gandhi served as a stretcher-bearer on the British side in the Boer War, and he was prepared to do the same again in the war of 1914-18. Even after he had completly abjured violence he was honest enough to see that in war it is usually necessary to take sides. He did not—indeed, since his whole political life centered round a struggle for national independence, he could not—take the sterile and dishonest line

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of pretending that in every war both sides are exactly the same and it makes no difference who wins. Nor did he, like most Western pacifists, specialize in avoiding awkward questions. In relation to the late war, one question that every pacifist had a clear obligation to answer was: "What about the Jews? Are you prepared to see them exterminated? If not, how do you propose to save them without resorting to war?" I must say that I have never heard, from any Western pacifist, an honest answer to this question, though I have heard plenty of evasions, usually of the "you're another" type. But it so happens that Gandhi was asked a somewhat similar question in 1938 and that his answer is on record in Mr. Louis Fischer's *Gandhi and Stalin*. According to Mr. Fischer, Gandhi's view was that the German Jews ought to commit collective suicide, which "would have aroused the world and the people of Germany to Hitler's violence." After the war he justified himself: the Jews had been killed anyway, and might as well have died significantly. One has the impression that this attitude staggered even so warm an admirer as Mr. Fischer, but Gandhi was merely being honest. If you are not prepared to take life, you must often be prepared for lives to be lost in some other way. When, in 1942, he urged non-violent resistance against a Japanese invasion, he was ready to admit that it might cost several million deaths.

At the same time there is reason to think that Gandhi, who after all was born in 1869, did not understand the nature of totalitarianism and saw everything in terms of his own struggle against the British government. The important point here is not so much that the British treated him forbearingly as that he was always able to command publicity. As can be seen from the phrase quoted above, he believed in "arousing the world," which is only possible if the world gets a chance to hear what you are doing. It is difficult to see how Gandhi's methods could be applied in a country where opponents of the regime disappear in the middle of the night and are never heard of again. Without a free press and the right of assembly, it is impossible not merely to appeal to outside opinion, but to bring a mass movement into being, or even to make your intentions known to your adversary. Is there a Gandhi in Russia at this moment? And if there is, what is he accomplishing? The Russian masses could only practice civil disobedience if the same idea happened to occur to all of them simultaneously, and even then, to judge by the history of the Ukraine famine, it would make no difference. But let it be granted that non-violent resistance can be effective against one's own government, or against an occupying power: even so, how does one put it into practice internationally? Gandhi's various conflicting statements on the late war seem to show that he felt the difficulty

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of this. Applied to foreign politics, pacifism either stops being pacifist or becomes appeasement. Moreover the assumption, which served Gandhi so well in dealing with individuals, that all human beings are more or less approachable and will respond to a generous gesture, needs to be seriously questioned. It is not necessarily true, for example, when you are dealing with lunatics. Then the question becomes: Who is sane? Was Hitler sane? And is it not possible for one whole culture to be insane by the standards of another? And, so far as one can gauge the feelings of whole nations, is there any apparent connection between a generous deed and a friendly response? Is gratitude a factor in international politics?

These and kindred questions need discussion, and need it urgently, in the few years left to us before somebody presses the button and the rockets begin to fly. It seems doubtful whether civilization can stand another major war, and it is at least thinkable that the way out lies through non-violence. It is Gandhi's virtue that he would have been ready to give honest consideration to the kind of question that I have raised above; and, indeed, he probably did discuss most of these questions somewhere or other in his innumerable newspaper articles. One feels of him that there was much that he did not understand, but not that there was anything that he was frightened of saying or thinking. I have never been able to feel much liking for Gandhi, but I do not feel sure that as a political thinker he was wrong in the main, nor do I believe that his life was a failure. It is curious that when he was assassinated, many of his warmest admirers exclaimed sorrowfully that he had lived just long enough to see his life work in ruins, because India was engaged in a civil war which had always been foreseen as one of the by-products of the transfer of power. But it was not in trying to smoothe down Hindu-Moslem rivalry that Gandhi had spent his life. His main political objective, the peaceful ending of British rule, had after all been attained. As usual, the relevant facts cut across one another. On the one hand, the British did get out of India without fighting, an event which very few observers indeed would have predicted until about a year before it happened. On the other hand, this was done by a Labor government, and it is certain that a Conservative government, especially a government headed by Churchill, would have acted differently. But if, by 1945, there had grown up in Britain a large body of opinion sympathetic to Indian independence, how far was this due to Gandhi's personal influence? And if, as may happen, India and Britain finally settle down into a decent and friendly relationship, will this be partly because Gandhi, by keeping up his struggle obstinately and without hatred, dis-

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infected the political air? That one even thinks of asking such questions indicates his stature. One may feel, as I do, a sort of aesthetic distaste for Gandhi, one may reject the claims of sainthood made on his behalf (he never made any such claim himself, by the way), one may also reject sainthood as an ideal and therefore feel that Gandhi's basic aims were anti-human and reactionary: but regarded simply as a politician, and compared with the other leading political figures of our time, how clean a smell he has managed to leave behind!

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BOOKS

THOMAS MANN'S FAUST

DOCTOR FAUSTUS. By Thomas Mann. Alfred A. Knopf. $3.50.

With this novel Mr. Mann has returned to a familiar theme and scene. *Doctor Faustus* closes the circle of a life's work begun with the *Buddenbrooks* and *Tonio Kröger*. It has been praised as holding up a mirror to the German soul; it has been criticized for being obscure and ponderous. It is neither. It is an important document for other reasons than the re-interpretation of the "Faustian" myth. It is a remarkable achievement not so much on the level on which it attempts to convey a positive message, but rather on the different level on which it fails to solve the basic problems it has raised.

On the former level, *Doctor Faustus* purports to show how the hero, Adrian Leverkühn, becomes a musical genius at the price of failing as a human being. He creates a series of musical masterpieces,* but fails in every human, interpersonal relationship—whether it is friendship, love, the outside world, or the care of a child. Moreover, there is an intrinsic connection between Leverkühn's achievements as a musical genius and his failure as a human being—and, by analogy, between the achievements of a "good" Germany (from Bach, Beethoven to Leverkühn) with Germany's failure in the society of nations (from Luther, Frederick II to Hitler). But the only clue which makes Leverkühn's tragic fate (and, by implication, that of Germany) meaningful is the pact with the devil or an explanation in terms of the dionysian, demonic element of his nature. The only concrete experience which affects his life, the syphilitic infection intentionally incurred, is precisely on this level. Nothing else

* Mr. Mann attempts to most elaborate transcription of musical meanings into literary symbols—an undertaking which, I think, is carried too far, but which I cannot competently judge. However, this problem of rendering musical symbols in a different artistic medium seems to me well worth a separate study on the basis of the ingenious attempt made in this book.

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seems to have any influence on the unfolding of his tragic fate. There remains the conclusion that aesthetic values are intrinsically incompatible with moral or social values, that art is intrinsically hostile to society; but this conclusion—derived from Mr. Mann's interpretation of Nietzsche rather than from Nietzsche's theories—is not substantiated by anything else in the book. To be sure, Leverkühn goes to his doom as does Germany; but these two elements only meet symbolically through the pact of the devil or the "demonic" theory. Otherwise, Leverkühn is entirely isolated from his social environment—a strange, synthetic character rather than a significant symbol. Thus any search for a conclusive analogy between his story and the recent history of Germany is quite unrewarding. The values of the book do not lie on the level on which it restates this "Faustian" solution for the problem of the artist and society, but rather on the level where it fails to give any conclusive interpretation.

Doctor Faustus is a melancholy, tragic tale—in the medieval tradition, quite unlike Goethe's poem. In this version of the legend, no supernatural intervention, no anthropodicee of ceaseless striving cheat the devil out of his due. The finale is unrelieved by any prospect or hope of salvation. Insanity, death, and destruction are its only *leitmotifs*. Germany is totally defeated and destroyed. The narrator is "an old man, well-nigh broken by the horrors of the times." An actress has committed suicide; a well-known violinist has been shot to death by his former mistress, the wife of an art historian; a young child has succumbed to cerebro-spinal meningitis; the hero of the book has gone insane. Even the artistic achievement flowering on this soil of a doomed society and bought at the price of one's own life is a *fleur du mal*. "This dark tone-poem (Leverkühn's last oratorio on the "Lamentations of Dr. Faustus") permits up to the very end no consolation, appeasement, transfiguration"; it is a counterpart and negation of Beethoven's Ninth. Thus even the creative effort itself ends on a note of despair and negation. Not even the work of art is left as a symbol of salvation for the doomed individual, as a meaningful protest against or liberation from a doomed society.

Viewed against the background of a life's work singularly dedicated to the illumination (and possibly solution) of the problem of the artist in our times, this melancholy and pessimistic conclusion commands respect and admiration. It is almost tantamount to an admission of personal failure on the part of the author. The problem of art in bourgeois society turns out to be ultimately insoluble. All positive theories (perhaps even the "Faustian" myth), all creative efforts ultimately appear as

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questionable and problematic. All we can be sure of (and set down in a chronicle such as this) is that this society has ceased to exist, that the artist is lost, and that perhaps even the creative act itself is doomed to failure. Perhaps we might still ask: what kind of human existence can we envisage after reaching the limits (and the negation) of bourgeois society as in the recent history of Germany; or, what kind of art can we envisage after reaching the limits (and the negation) of art in the works of—Leverkühn? But *Doctor Faustus* raising these questions does not answer them. The man writing this book no longer seems to know the answers. This—though not a novel theme in contemporary literature—is certainly a significant summing-up of Mr. Mann's own *credo* as a writer. It also refutes the charge that the book is ponderous and pontifical. On the contrary: this is one book where Mr. Mann is anything but the high-priest of art, morals, and society as he has frequently been presented to the public.

The same inconclusive, personal element intrudes into Mr. Mann's attitude towards the German problem; for the latter, too is treated on a level different from the "Faustian" allegory. This level appears through the interposition of the narrator, Serenus Zeitblom. By using a narrator the author is both involved in and detached from the events he is describing. He is partly engaged through the comments of the narrator, partly detached—in ironic self-parody—through creating the figure of Zeitblom as a character in the novel. Zeitblom is a peculiar representative of the humanist tradition which has loomed so large in other writings of Thomas Mann. While earnest and learned, he is also naive, pedantic, snobbish, narrow, and highly ineffectual; while lamenting the tragic fate of Leverkühn and Germany, he is also fascinated by it and loyal to this fascination to the bitter end. This humanist—or the tradition he represents—is more than an impartial spectator; he is also an actor in the tragedy he records; for surely Germany was not only the country of great musical geniuses, but also of great scientists, writers, and scholars. But then the dual role Zeitblom plays lends a double meaning to his own moralizing reflections. They reveal not only the guilt of others, but also his own; and at the end he seems to realize this himself in words which might well be interpreted as the author's own *apologia* for having undertaken this work: "Germany herself," Zeitblom laments, "the unhappy nation is strange to me, utterly strange and that because, convinced of her awful end, I drew from her sins and hid from them in seclusion. Must I not ask myself whether or not I did right? And again: did I actually do it? I have clung to one man, one suffering, significant human being, clung unto death; and I have depicted his life, which

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never ceased to fill me with love and grief. To me it seems as if this loyalty might atone for my having fled in horror from my country's guilt." Thus the final indictment is leveled not only at the accused, but also at the heart and conscience of the judge. And the man who is here passing judgment on Germany (obviously in the name of the author) again expresses a sense of sorrow, failure, and guilt rather than a "Faustian" myth or a pontifical knowledge of what is right or wrong.

It remains to say that this discussion neglects the rich texture of a work whose construction—similar to the music it describes—carries to an extreme the traditional form of the novel with which Mr. Mann started as a writer. There are brilliant portraits of members of that segment of pre-Nazi, German society, the intellectual and artistic élite of the bourgeoisie, which Mr. Mann knows best and with which he has always dealt expertly. There are long sections of the book when these portraits of the theologians at Halle or the artists and intellectuals in the Munich *salons*—variations on the theme of a sick, doomed society—completely dominate the progress of the work to the exclusion of the central figure. But in the biography of Leverkühn, too, there are episodes —such as his encounter with the diseased woman (drawn from the Nietzsche correspondence), his dialogue with the devil, or his dramatic final collapse—which raise the work far above the level of musical or social theory and give it the stature of a unique artistic achievement.

Hans Meyerhoff

THE PROGRESSIVE HAWTHORNE

THE PORTABLE HAWTHORNE. Edited by Malcolm Cowley. Viking. $2.00.
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE: THE AMERICAN YEARS. By Robert Cantwell. Rinehart & Company. $6.00.
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE. By Randall Stewart. Yale Press. $4.00.

Our thin, self-lacerating, and discontinuous culture automatically produces such uneasy collaborations as this one between Mr. Cowley, the hard-working scribe and oddly impressionable cultural sounding-board, and the publishing industry with its concept of the "Portable." The Hawthorne who emerges has had such a bad fall between stools, or clichés, that he appears almost as shattered and giddy as we—but this is appearance contrary to reality.

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The concept of the "Portable" is partly to blame. It works very well and usefully with some authors. But with Hawthorne it means devoting over a third of the six-hundred pages to *The Scarlet Letter,* a wonderful work but easily available in cheap editions; and probably it has already been read by the people who will buy this "Portable." Mr. Cowley himself appears to wish that he might have printed *The House of the Seven Gables* or *The Blithedale Romance;* the latter he very rightly feels "deserves more attention than it has lately been receiving." Clearly, everyone concerned had been sensitively responsive to present needs, this "Portable" could have been unified around *The Blithedale Romance* instead of simply draped around *The Scarlet Letter.*

Even if the convention of the "Portable" had allowed this, however, Mr. Cowley would presumably have missed his editorial chance. There is no evidence that "the original problem" in writing *The Blithedale Romance* was "to write a realistic novel about the life and death of a utopian community." This is Mr. Cowley's "original problem," not Hawthorne's who had no fetish of "social realism." *The Blithedale Romance* is a great political statement, but Hawthorne's "original problem," in this romance as in very nearly all his works, is to deal with the Hawthorne image: a cultural image of sexual love and moral community.

The most common cliché about Hawthorne is that he thought solitude a crime and believed in the brotherhood of man and in man's "dependence on society." This is good liberal doctrine. But, as it is usually presented, it is also such a vaporous idea that you cannot imagine a serious writer of fiction worrying about it. Of course Hawthorne himself was a solitary man much of the time (though he was also a worldly man who died, with well-contrived symbolism, practically in the arms of an ex-president of the United States). As an artist and moralist, Hawthorne is not really interested in solitude as such or in the estrangement of the artist. He is interested, like many great writers, in Fraud. His villains—Aylmer, Chillingworth, Ethan Brand, Hollingsworth—are guilty of fraudulently involving themselves with other human beings without accepting the tragic moral implications of the involvement (this is the last theme we wish to discover in the author we are criticizing). Mr. Cowley has incidentally endowed Hawthorne's morality with a kind of liberalized Moscow-Trials legalism. Ethan Brand deserved his fate, he says; but some of Hawthorne's other villains "might be taught human brotherhood by their very crimes and, if they publicly confessed, might be taken back into the community." This unconscious note of modernism (for surely it hasn't much to do with Hawthorne or

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his time) is a piece with Cowley's observation that Hawthorne's early seclusion in Salem and Melville's whaling voyage correspond to, among other things, the years during which the modern young writer works for the Luce organization.

Another cliché perpetuated by Mr. Cowley is the idea that all great writers are "obsessed" with sin and theology. There is no doubt that Hawthorne can be meaningfully described as a Christian writer (see Paul Elmer More's brilliant essay). But it won't do to say that this worldly, large-minded, bitterly clear-eyed ante-bellum American gentleman—a spiritual realist, skeptic, and astringent Promethean—"believed" (just like that) in original sin, predestination, and providence and that "he had a faith in the value of confession and absolution that sometimes brought him close to Roman Catholicism." If you do not understand the great writer, or discern the possible range of liberal intelligence, or see how he makes darksome moral and cultural realities out of theology and everything else, you assume that he must be a prodigious expert in Evil and Roman Catholicism. (Thus progressive critics always say that Melville's white whale represents Evil.)

When he is trying to save Hawthorne from earlier modes of underestimation, Mr. Cowley is half way between Parrington and truth. We must now see, as he very well says, that Hawthorne was not a delicate plant, that he had, in fact, a "robust talent," that his mind was not meager, cold, and timorous. Fine. Having gone so far, the next thing is to cease this pusillanimous skirmishing with one of the few cultural fathers we have and come home to Nathaniel, who is not an ideology, a religion, or a white whale, but only an old American who was an artist and who knew a great deal about men, women, and society. But Mr. Cowley *skirmishes.*

And in this connection, consider the enormous and so American error of his interpretation of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." Mr. Cowley says that this story is "the legend of a youth who achieves manhood through searching for a spiritual father." Correct. The tarred-and-feathered old man at the end of the story is Hawthorne's most moving image of fully tragic humanity—one of the few figures in American literature who approach the dignity of a Shakespearean or Sophoclean hero. But he is too terrible in this day and age, too knowing, too real. And so Mr. Cowley decides that the youth achieves manhood by "finding that the object of his search is an impostor." An impostor! Does not Mr. Cowley sense Hawthorne's pity for Major Molineux, his reverence for him, or the anguish with which he makes the populace laugh at *him—with* that terrible American ridicule of tragic man?

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Mr. Cantwell regards "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" as a "genuinely high-spirited, comic story." What could be more rollicking?—a bewildered boy comes to Boston in the dead of the hellish night looking for Major Molineux and finds that his kinsman is being tarred and feathered and tossed out of town. Mr. Cantwell has also discovered the truth about *The Scarlet Letter*. It is the "story of a doctor, a clergyman, and the woman they loved." The doctor represents Science. The clergyman represents Religion. The woman cannot choose between them. Moral: neither Science nor Religion is sufficient in itself.

Yet Mr. Cantwell is primarily a biographer rather than a critic. He belongs to the contemporary movement in American biography which might be called the Hodge-Podge, Sears-Roebuck, or Van-Wyck-Brooks School. The theory of this school is that the art of biography consists of displaying an inordinately conspicuous consumption of facts—any facts—and that in order to achieve Vitality and Abundance the biographer should ignore such stodgy concepts as commonsense, coherence, grammar, punctuation, and the dramatization of his theme. The following paragraph is worse than most, but it is a fair indication of Mr. Cantwell's method:

> The femininity of Hawthorne's world increased when, at the age of nine, he injured his foot. He had been playing ball. The circumstances of the injury are vague. It was said that one foot ceased to grow, and that he was threatened with lameness. At any rate it was plain that he could not go to school. He was delighted and made the most of his mysterious ailment to stay at home. Hannah Lord, the hired girl, bundled him up and carried him out into the street. He hopped down to the stage-coach office. One remedy attempted was to pour cold water on his foot from an upper window. The War of 1812 began, with so close a vote in favor of the declaration of war that its very beginning was an admission that much of the country—especially New England—was opposed to fighting it.

One of Mr. Cantwell's means of achieving Abundance is to give a short biography of almost every one of the hundreds of persons mentioned in the book, and if possible to print the person's picture. Having heard that Hawthorne's wife often dreamed that the Duke of Buckingham had stabbed her in the breast, I was therefore disappointed to find neither a biography nor a picture of the Duke.

To turn from Mr. Cantwell's teeming and soggy biography to the academicism of Professor Stewart is sheer exhilaration. By simply and often sensitively setting down the facts about Hawthorne's life, by frequently quoting Hawthorne's letters and journals, and by putting the

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whole in orderly form, Mr. Stewart has produced the most useful biography yet to appear. And one can make one's own reservations about the last chapter, in which, having postponed it till then, Mr. Stewart deals with Hawthorne's thought and his artistry.

One note, however, on this last chapter. It used to be assumed that people who kill other people are guilty of murder and/or other crimes. But this strange idea never occurs to the progressive critics who discuss such a story as "The Birthmark," in which a scientist kills his wife in the process of trying to remove a blemish from her face. Mr. Stewart, who is approximately Mr. Cowley's equal in seeing through the fallacies of modern progressivism and yet falling victim to them, regards the scientist in "The Birthmark" as too exclusively intellectual and as a man who wishes to exercise power over another human being. In short, the scientist is not guilty of murder, fraud, or any other heinous crime. His real offense is that he is undemocratic. Mr. Stewart thus mistakenly intimates that Hawthorne was suspicious of too much intelligence and thought that all men should be "common men." I doubt if Mr. Stewart *wants* to intimate this. It remains, however, an unexamined assumption of his work on Hawthorne.

Richard Chase

POE'S LETTERS AS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

THE LETTERS OF EDGAR ALLAN POE. Edited by John Ward Ostrom. Harvard University Press. $10.00.

Poe's reputation as a writer has never been distinct from his personal reputation as a difficult character. "Difficult," of course, is a mild word to describe the immediate reaction of many of his contemporaries. Two years after Poe's death the Rev. George Gilfillan graciously closed a slanderous article on him by wishing for "peace even to the well-nigh putrid dust of Edgar Poe." But the Rev. Gilfillan had extenuating circumstances in his favor. He was basing his charity on the infamous "Memoir" by Rufus W. Griswold, concerning whom Baudelaire enquired: "Are there no regulations in America to keep curs out of cemeteries?" A little decency and a good deal of scholarship have long since dispelled most of the Griswoldian fog—in time to have left Poe a well documented and enticing landmark for the curiosity of

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sympathetic but sometimes impertinent biographers and critics equipped with straws from the "new knowledge." To parody I. A. Richards on psychological studies: In 10,000 years, if all goes well, we might expect (at this level) to know a good deal about Poe.

Fortunately, Dr. Ostrom's splendidly edited and elegantly printed edition of Poe's letters has reduced the term of waiting. Few general readers will, perhaps, have been familiar with the old edition of the letters emanating from the University of Virginia in 1902, but Mr. Arthur Hobson Quinn in his authoritative but critically inept biography of Poe, published in 1941, incorporated a large number of Poe's letters in his text, and therefore the figure of Poe which emerges from Dr. Ostrom's two volumes will not be altogether a surprise to anyone who is likely to read them. But Poe speaking for himself entirely (with the exception of the useful little explanatory notes with which Dr. Ostrom follows each of the 333 letters included here) is surprisingly revealing. The contrapuntal development of skilled wiliness and naïveté that runs through these letters as a whole, leaving a thousand vulnerable gaps to any unfriendly critic willing to accept such advantages, is astonishing. Offhand I can think of no parallel among the letters of American or English writers, although there are a few of Poe's letters (the group to John Allan, for example) whose tone evokes in the reader something of that pain he must feel on reading Baudelaire's letters to his mother. In certain respects both men seem to have had an unhatched intelligence and sensibility, grown to remarkable maturity in a shell too strong to be cracked from the inside, and which could be broken from the outside only with fatal results. Such personalities are not likely to be pleasant, and only by indirection can they be helpful in anyone else's human development. But their indirections are often powerful in their suggestiveness, and their unpleasantness is seldom deliberate.

Letter 48 (as numbered by Dr. Ostrom) is to Poe's aunt, Maria Clemm, and begins: "My dearest Aunty, I am blinded with tears while writing this letter—I have no wish to live another hour . . . you well know how little I am able to bear up under the pressure of grief. My bitterest enemy would pity me could he now read my heart—my last my only hold on life is cruelly torn away—I have no desire to live and *will not.*" A few weeks later, the mood intensified, he writes to the amiable John P. Kennedy, who had been kind to him (letter 50): "I am wretched and know not why. Console me—for you can. But let it be quickly—or it will be too late. Write me immediately. Convince me that it is worth one's while—that it is at all necessary to live, and you will prove yourself indeed my friend. Persuade me to do what is right. I do

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not mean this—I do not mean you should consider what I now write you a jest—oh pity me! for I feel my words are incoherent—but I will recover myself. You will not fail to see that I am suffering under a depression of spirits which will not fail to ruin me should it be long continued. Write me then, and quickly. Urge me to do what is right. Your words will have more weight with me than the words of others—for you were my friend when no one else was. Fail not—as you value your peace of mind hereafter."

These two quotations are impoverished by being extracted from the full context of the two volumes which echoes with variety the particular notes heard here. The letters taken all together offer a mélange of self-pity, vindictiveness, hypocrisy, and rationalized weakness; but they also offer a picture of deep emotional sickness, despair, and wounded affection. Only an angel or a fool would dare to undertake a moral judgment. But a literary critical judgment, while ultimately moral, exists in its own right, and the letters are illuminating from this point of view, for they confirm what one had suspected all along: that the ratiocinative strain which is the compelling strength in Poe's best stories and articles ("The Mystery of Marie Roget," "The Purloined Letter," "The Gold Bug," "Maelzel's Chess-Player," etc.) is not the pure vein of reasoning which it seems, but is deeply and intricately imbedded in a widely ramified attempt at self-justification.

It has occasionally been maintained that Poe was a first-rate journalist. Such a view has on its side the weighty argument that Poe did make a success of the literary magazines with which he was associated; and Poe's frequent and obvious vulgarity finds a ready explanation in the duties and attitudes imposed by his journalistic work. But despite the numerous letters in the present collection seeming to validate such an opinion, there is a quality in Poe's ingenious and over-elaborated explanations to poets whom he has reviewed unfavorably or whose work he has rejected, as well as in the web-like flatteries of his professional overtures to other writers that, so far from suggesting the journalist, impresses one as an extension of that nervous sensibility whose hysterical heightening was observed in the two quotations above. Poe's letters, then, record both his uncontrollable emotional collapses, and the complex, studied rationalizations by which he tried at other times to excuse and guard against those breakdowns, and come to working terms with society. These two sides of his correspondence are not so much related to each other as they are different aspects of the same thing. Reading these letters one begins to understand how it was possible for Poe to endow the logic with which he wrote his best stories with an intense excitement

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and passion, and make it the creative form of his work. He had through long unhappy years of verbal self-justification become emotionally enmeshed in the processes of reasoning itself.

Marius Bewley

TAEUBER-ARP'S WORK

SOPHIE TAEUBER—ARP. Edited by Georg Schmidt. Editions Holbein. $6.50.

The career of Taeuber-Arp has been commemorated by an impressive volume, which contains eighty-eight reproductions of her work (six in color) and essays by ten artists and writers associated with her in the abstract and constructivist movements. The writings (printed, unhappily, only in German and French) are concerned with reminiscences and appraisals of the artist's aesthetic contribution. As usual, the paintings, drawings, and reliefs rather overshadow the text they embellish; it is from these that we get our most intimate glimpse of this artist, who was surely the gentlest, yet one of the most determined, of her contemporaries.

The biographical material is not uninteresting, however, for Mme. Arp had many accomplishments. She began to paint when still a girl (it is regrettable that none of her sensitive early work, derived from the Japanese, appears in the book). It was as a dancer that she first became known to the public, with appearances in several ballet-companies, including that of Mary Wigman. In 1916 she was married to Hans Arp, then one of the founders of dada in Zürich, and it was not long before her own plastic instincts—so different from his—began to emerge in new paintings. Between the wars she and her husband moved to Paris, and in the environs they built a modern house (from her designs), where they lived until the Occupation. Perhaps her finest work was produced at Grasse in 1942. Her accidental death, owing to a defective gas stove, occurred the following year while on a visit to Switzerland.

Sophie Taeuber-Arp has remained almost unknown in America. This cannot entirely be ascribed to her exceptional modesty, or even to the fact that her work presents few of the qualities usually associated with a 57th Street build-up. It stems rather from an opposition to the dominant currents of abstract art in America. Kandinsky, in his contribution to the volume, has demonstrated that Taeuber-Arp mastered the "muted form"; he hastily adds that such a creative approach re-

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quires a far deeper knowledge of composition than "full-voiced projection." And it is for this very reason—apart from the innate quality of her best work—that I think her reputation will increase. She represents a branch of the abstract movement opposed to most of what has been acclaimed in western art for many centuries. Today, on every hand, we are met with a glorification of "personality." The influence of Taeuber-Arp is turned to the opposite pole, toward the most forgotten impulse to build something that is beautiful *as an object*—like a vase or a temple—and that will stand alone, without relation to its signature. In an effort to progress even further in this direction, she and Arp executed together a series of "communal compositions" (two are reproduced) built from rectangular subdivisions; these are clipped on a mechanical cutter, for scissors might betray a tell-tale "personal" touch.

The pictures in this book disclose an additional facet which modern painters have approached from many angles. Unity of form and expression does not provide much difficulty in a primitive society; but when the field has the breadth that confronts the artist today, with all its intellectual obstructions to instinct, a considerable understanding is requisite for the exact fitting of the emotional projection within its structural limits. Taeuber-Arp has invariably keyed down her expression until every spot and line is aware of its position within the fabric. Several of her contemporaries approached the problem simultaneously; but few succeeded through such concentration, and none, I think, with more variety within limits that were self-applied.

George L. K. Morris

A MODERN VOLUPTUARY

FIFTY SECRETS OF MAGIC CRAFTSMANSHIP. By Salvador Dali. The Dial Press. $7.50.

Salvador Dali's *Fifty Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship* evades category. It is not quite a book and it is many texts in one; a Bartlett's of Leonardo, Cellini, Vasari, recondite natural science and the surrealist social register. If the sources are only indifferently acknowledged, they are no less clear for it. The reader who insists on Dr. Johnson's "bottom of common sense" with his reading should be advised to look elsewhere. And even the most exotic palate may find Dali too rich a diet and be moved to exasperation by a series of sybillic pronouncements that is misrepresented by author and publisher as a painter's

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handbook, instructive in the "science and chemistry of painting." Actually there is not an item of useful information on technical procedures in the entire book—unless the endless recommendations for inducing mild swamp fever and auto-hypnotic hallucination are considered indispensable for sound picture-making. The concluding piece of intelligence, the climactic fiftieth secret the prologue has prepared us for as the core of Dali's method, is a typical frustration, with its advice to seek divine guidance.

On the other hand, if we acquiesce in this poorly disguised swindle, we can find something to admire in Dali's uncanny taste for the extravagant; he has his sociological interest as well. By going to his drawings and color reproductions, scattered through the text and along the margins, we can assure ourselves these points of interest have little or no connection with what is commonly understood as art or expression. The myths of Dali's draftsmanship and virtuosity are over-generous interpretations for the rubbery congruity of his forms, his mechanical penmanship and disinfected surfaces. But there is a peculiar underscoring of effect that needs explaining. We are aware Dali is consumed by something. Even George Orwell's shrewd reading of Dali as the misplaced Victorian decorator whose naughtiness conceals a commonplace inspiration is not entirely satisfactory, although it helps us to understand why his defiances have proved so undamaging to authority. Dali might be fruitfully examined as the child of popular culture who still retains a nostalgia for a condition of life only the Medicis could support. Lacking that, Dali has blandly become his own patron and audience, fashioning his style on whatever ingredients of a counterfeit commercial culture are ready to hand. The discrepancy between his essentially miniaturist gift, a talent for enamels, and his uncontained ambition is expressed as a species of wealth-fantasy. Even his aggrandizement of the past is conducted in a rather demented spirit of acquisition. His position is justified by making the old masters hygienic enough to accommodate window display. After the process of disinfection, a real taste for the extravagant still makes itself felt. But it is the intoxicated, slightly voracious and undiscriminating response to luxury of one of the culturally disinherited. A prolonged apprenticeship to window-shopping in a mean street has reduced Dali to a voluptuary of the toilet article.

Besides the sociological content, there is a certain interest for the bibliophile in the illustrations, a fabulous rummage of heraldic devices, surgical appliances, scientific text-book illustration, recollections of old masters and the mail order catalogue—Dali's paste-pot fiat edition of the erudition of the past and the vulgarity of the present. When he is not

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pursuing profane models, Dali observes a tone of sobriety suitable to a family tree that includes Leonardo, etc. The book opens on a slightly pietistic note with a madonna in the frontispiece (an entreaty for blessing, presumably on the labors of the book, is attached) and closes in utter contrition with a Pietà as its final illustration.

Sam Hunter

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VARIETY

THE MEANING OF TERROR

I will set down a few propositions under two headings, though the argument can be expanded in all directions.

1. *The Main Reality*

All pleasure is innocent. We, the hedonists, are innocent, even though we now find no pleasure in life. Pleasure does not strike deep, it can exist in the mere absence of pain; like our virtues, it is the shadow cast by its opposite, and is not itself the real substance. But joy, said Nietzsche, wants "deep, profound eternity." Pleasure is not joy; it wants nothing of eternity, it is modest, there is no need to be alarmed at it. Yet most of the world fears pleasure. How much greater a fear we must have of joy, how much greater an incapacity to experience it! Refusing pleasure, we make pain the reality. Incapable of joy, we have only its opposite, which is terror.

Terror is today the main reality, because it is the model reality. The concentration camp is the model educational system and the model form of government. War is the model enterprise and the model form of communality. These are abstract propositions, but even so they are obvious; when we fill them in with experience, they are overwhelming. Unfortunately, there is nothing else into which we can fit our experience—traditions are broken and culture is unavailable. A culture is dead when the experience of men has no place in it. Our culture is an empty form, standing for a continuity of experience which is now discontinued, for the reality and inviolability of human values that are everywhere violated and denied. The common premise has always been: *still, there is mankind,* in virtue of which even the lowest of peasants and the most ignorant could be a man of deep culture. Today the cultured man is isolated; he may still exist, but his humanity is his own. He cannot share it with anyone (apart from his own exertions) because the cultural form that conveyed humanity and assured the transaction from one man to the next has been destroyed.

Men of culture are the first and the last to understand what has taken place. We know what has happened—and even this sets us apart; the majority do not know, in the sense, at least, of a knowledge that is more than information. The story has been printed in the papers—but the papers are full of lies. There have been films of the concentration camps, crematoriums and gas chambers—but the films are only a public dream.

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What the people see in the movies, they are rendered incapable of experiencing directly. Hollywood is the good dream, and Buchenwald, the bad. Neither represents a reality. We saw the images of terror a long way off, far in advance of journalism and photography. Nevertheless, we, who know, still ask, "How is this possible?" How is it possible that thousands of men, women, children and infants should be lined up in a field, to be shot before an open ditch, and that their screams should not be heard? That furnaces should be stuffed with human beings? That thousands should be marched into airtight chambers, to be gassed or steamed to death, their naked bodies stuck together by the pressure and the heat? The death-schedules are possible: efficiency; the salvaged hair, gold fillings and wedding bands: industry. But that no one should hear the screams? We cannot understand, we are as numb as the perpetrators of the crime. Our knowledge should shock us, it should stir us deeply, it should make our old life impossible, subjectively, as it is impossible in fact. But we are the true conservatives, who conserve values. The light is doused—we keep the after-image alive; the wires are cut—we hold private conversations. But everyone is now a pragmatist (great gain); knowledge is only for action, as ours,

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too, must be, even if it be only to overcome the numbness that hinders our understanding of what has happened to the old world, and our participation in the new—decently, of course. But that goes without saying. We have our decency. What we need is necessity.

2. *The End of Alienation*

We are so sensitive that we cannot feel any more. When the moment comes to respond, our response is all spent in the anticipation. Hence our famous "alienation"—an alienation from the world we saw coming. Few of us realize that we are no longer alienated, now that this world has come. Woe to the prophet, the prophecy has come true! Hence the attack on intellectuals, the irresponsibles, the decadents (would that everyone were as decadent as we). But at least we are at home in this world. It is they, taken unprepared by the reality, who are alienated from it. We are the guides through the museum of dead culture—or if we, too, have lost our humanity, we are at least the nimble goats who can pick their way among the ruins.

Still we hear it said all around us that we are in a worse position than before—granted, but it is not the same position!—that we have nothing to say, and that even if we have, and our message be more precious than ever, we lack the language to express it and the audience to hear it. This merely des-

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cribes the old alienation, when we saw what was coming and the rest of the world did not. But the rest of the world has caught up. The conditions have been established, by way of the common experience of the terror, for a universal communication. We can communicate the following.

Our old culture in which humanity transmitted its common life from one generation to the next, was a moral culture, and the ethical was supreme: no greater good than good, no greater evil than evil. The death of our old culture came about when the evil greater than evil occurred—which is the terror. The good greater than good does not yet exist on earth: it is joy, which wants eternity. Together with terror, joy must replace the old pair of opposites, the old limits, which are now surpassed. Joy beyond good and terror beyond evil—the only principles. Everything else is privation.

But joy exists only in the minds of a few poets, though all men, unaware, may yearn for it. Its real existence will require a new character of mankind, which is also to say, a new culture. What will we have to take joy in? How can there be pleasures after the terror? But let us not speak of pleasure, we have no more innocence. (And how well we know, though we dare not admit the secret, that even the innocent pleasures were too much for us.) Our joy will be

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in love and restoration, in the sensing of humanity as the concrete thing, the datum of our cultural existence. It will lie in the creation of a new capacity, proof against terror, to experience our natural life to the full. What has once been transcended cannot be repeated; already we live without morality, though hypocrites study the old deceits. Men will go on to seek the good life in the direction of what is joyous; they know what is terrible. May the knowledge of joy come to them, and the knowledge of terror never leave!

So who is alienated? We are the prophets and inheritors of the present world and the only men who are at home in it, apart from the tyrannous bureaucrats—and even they regard us as their real enemies. It is impossible to live, to think, to create without bearing witness against the terror. But once we do so—behold, our great theme and occupation, our rôle, our language, our tone and our audience—for what else is worth hearing today? This is the ground we have to defend against the terror, and on which we may hope to make joy come alive.

Isaac Rosenfeld

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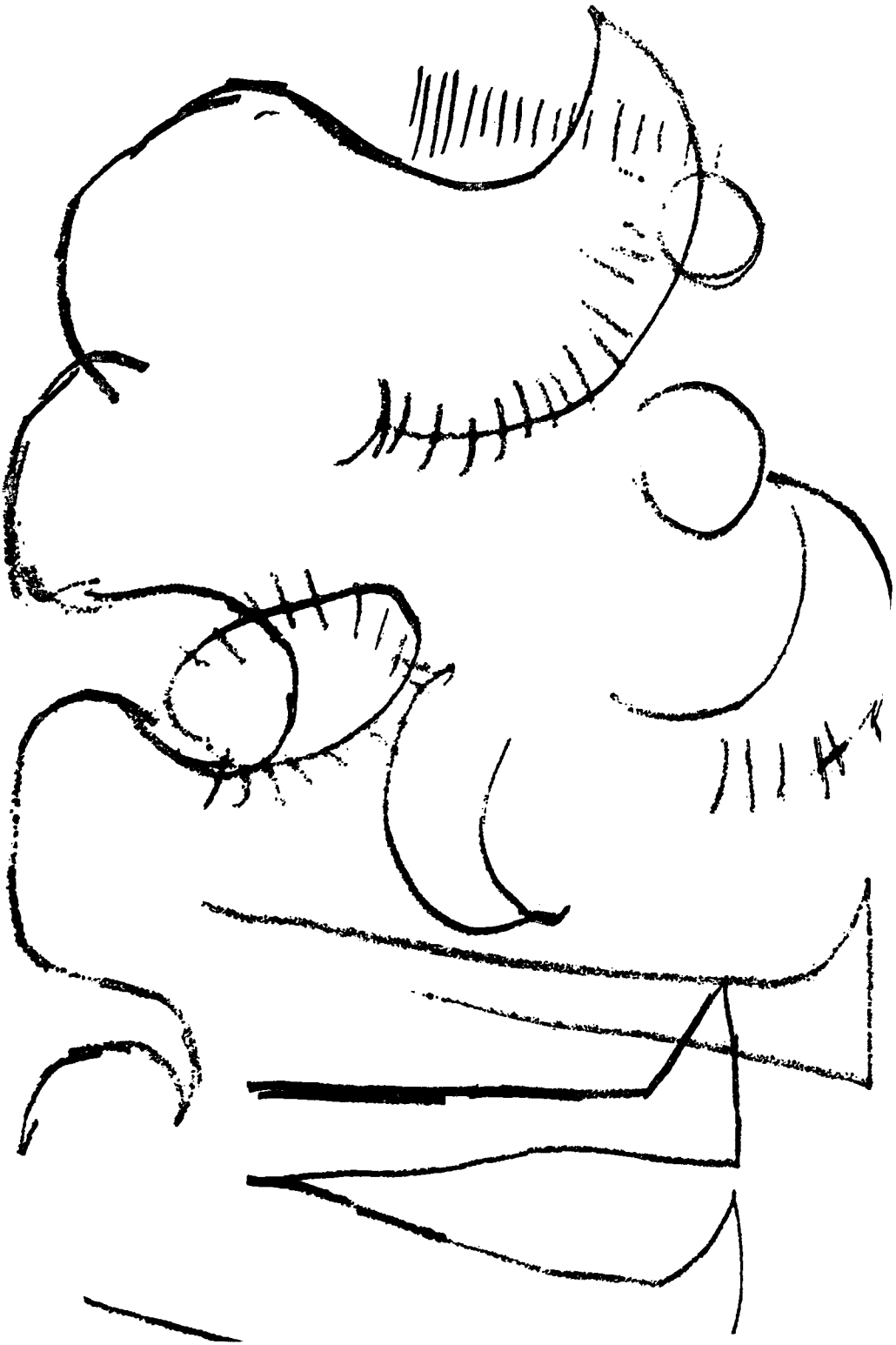

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